

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, by Frank Tousey.

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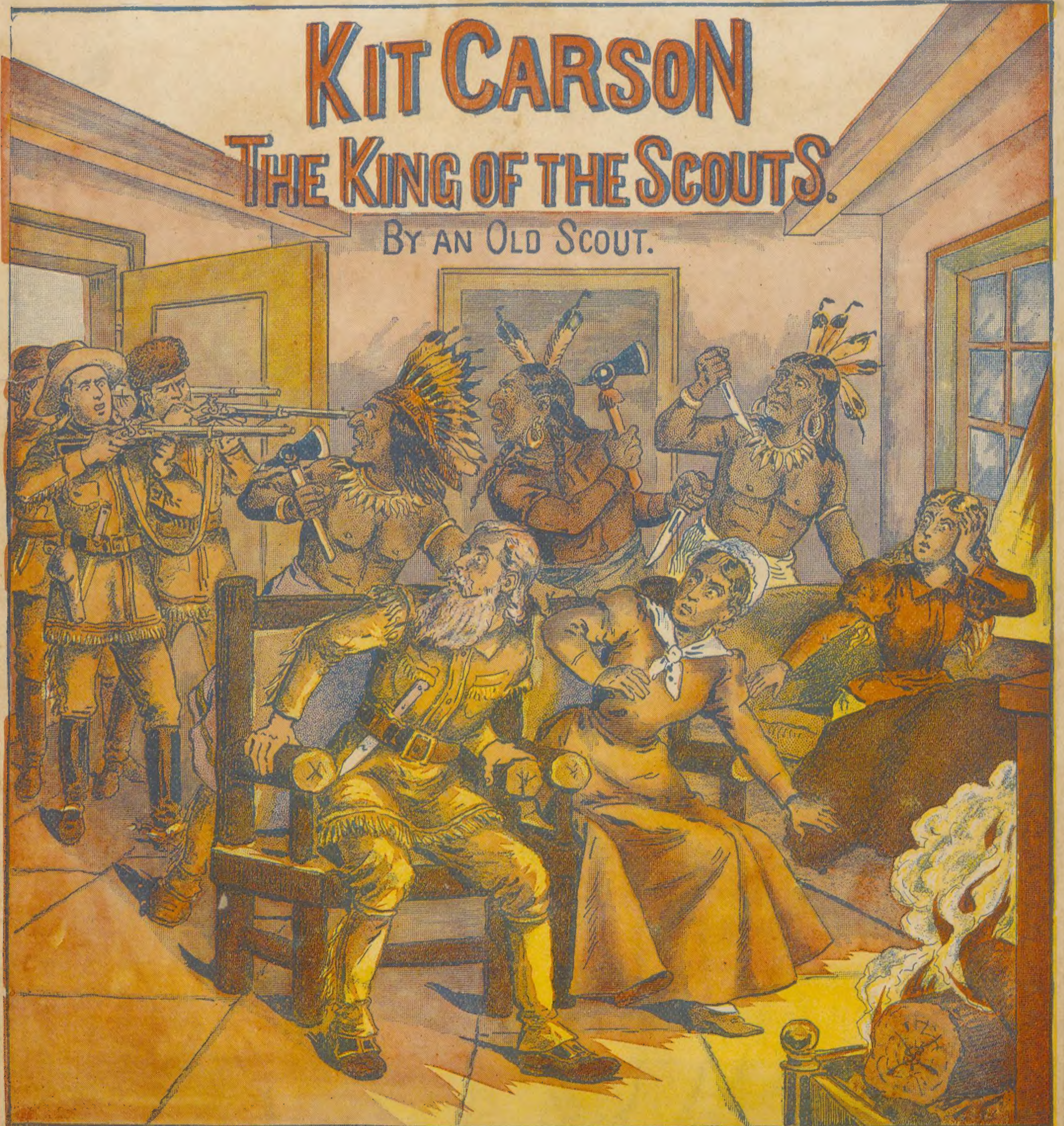
NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 23, 1898.

Price 5 Cents.

KIT CARSON

THE KING OF THE SCOUTS.

BY AN OLD SCOUT.



Kit Carson pushed open the door and dashed into the cabin. The three followed, and in another instant the savages were covered by the unerring rifles of the scouts. "Surrender!" cried Kit, in thunder tones.

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CHAPTER I.

KIT CARSON—OLD ANTUGA—THE ATTACK.

THE New World has furnished more modern adventures than any other part of the globe. The old days of knight errantry were not more fruitful of romance and adventure than the wild West of our great country in our day.

Ever since the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock certain heroic names have figured in American history, whose fame rests upon deeds of valor in combats with the aborigines of the country. Among these names Captain John Smith and Miles Standish stand at the top of the list—not as the greatest, perhaps, but as the first.

After them comes a long list of heroic names, reaching down to our own time, when we find the hair-lifting sons of the tomahawk and scalping-knife still fighting the palefaces—not on their old tramping-grounds, but in the far West, whither they have been slowly driven by the onward march of civilization.

Among the great names in the far West none is so widely known as that of Kit Carson, the great scout. He is recognized now, and was, in fact, in the prime of his life, the King of Scouts.

In his day the red men of the West were far more numerous than now. They were bold, daring and defiant, and only men of like qualities could stand successfully against them.

When gold was discovered in California, people were attracted thither from every part of the civilized world. They went in ships and landed at many places where a good anchorage could be found.

But the harbor of San Francisco being found to be one of the finest in the world, vessels naturally drifted there, and soon the foundations of a great city on its shore were laid.

'Frisco soon became the center of the gold region. To land in California one must needs go to San Francisco to take shipping for other ports.

As the excitement increased and the rich discoveries of gold deposits were noised abroad, the tide of emigration set in stronger.

People began to organize wagon trains to cross the plains—the "Overland Route" it was called—and then the trouble began. Driven across the "Great Father of Waters" the red men had been allowed undisputed possession of the plains. They had been hunting and trapping in all their glory, with only a few white men to compete with them in the chase.

But now that wagon train after wagon train commenced winding their slow lengths across the prairie, they thought the time for their great harvest had come. Their hunting parties became war parties, and the wagon trains fell easy prey to them. The men were killed and scalped and the young women carried away into a captivity worse than death itself.

It was then that a race of heroes sprang up whose exploits soon became the theme of every camp and household in the great West. They were the scouts.

Every wagon train that started across the plains had to have guides. Those guides were also scouts who knew the whole country. On them depended the safety of the trains. They were cool, daring fellows, quick to shoot, and seldom missed their targets when they fired.

In a few years the name of Kit Carson was as familiar to the American people as that of George Washington. He was more feared by the Indians than any other living white man.

In appearance he was not as big as his name. He was a fine

specimen of physical manhood, not much above the medium height. But his lithe form contained a fearful amount of activity and strength. His face wore a kindly expression all the time, except when the work of death was going on, and then he was more terrible than a tiger of the jungle.

The incessant attacks of the Indians on the wagon trains going across the plains to the Pacific slope at last induced the government to erect a series of forts along the border and far into the interior for their better protection.

To each of these forts were attached a number of scouts, whose business it was to watch the Indians and report to the commandants of the posts every movement they made. To do that work the scouts had to understand the Indian language, customs and habits, as well as be daring, cool, and reckless as to life.

At Fort Laramie young Kit Carson was the chief scout. There were five of them, and he was the leader.

One day, in company with Ben Hornady, another scout, Kit was compelled to stop on the banks of a small stream to doctor his horse, which had become suddenly ill.

"He's got the colic, Kit," said Ben, after watching the faithful animal for some time, "and got it bad, too."

"I believe you, Ben," said Kit, "and I've got to work hard to save him," and he proceeded to exert himself, bringing all his knowledge of horsemanship to bear on the case.

Hornady rendered him all the assistance in his power, and at last it seemed as if the horse would die.

"It's no use, Kit," said Ben, shaking his head.

Kit patted the suffering animal on the neck, and said, in the saddest voice:

"My poor Rocket!" and the suffering beast seemed to understand every word he uttered, "I will not leave you. Ben, we'll stay here until he either gives in or gets well."

"Of course," said Hornady, "we can't do otherwise. I see an old Indian coming this way on the other side of the water there."

Carson turned in the direction indicated, and saw an old Indian, whose bent form and faltering step told of the three score years and ten that had passed over his head since life began.

"Ah! I know old Antuga," he said. "He is an old medicine man. I wonder what he can be wandering off out here for. He is at least fifteen miles from his village."

"He's looking for herbs, I reckon," remarked Hornady, who well knew the habits of the Indian medicine men.

Kit Carson went across the creek to meet the old man. They were good friends.

"Antuga, the great medicine man, is too far away from his people," said Kit, approaching and extending his hand to the old Indian; "but I am glad to see you."

"Ugh! Antuga is sorry to see the young paleface here," and the old medicine man shook his head.

"Why, what's the matter, Antuga? Has your friendship grown cold, or—"

"Antuga's friendship never grows cold," replied the old man. "It is like the great river that runs forever in one direction. But the young men of his tribe are coming, and they love not the paleface who has slain so many of their people. Let him go away, and not meet the warriors, or there will be trouble. Antuga has spoken."

"I want no trouble with the young men, Antuga," replied young

Kit. "I never fight them or anyone else unless forced to do so. I would be their friend, as I am the friend of Antuga; but they will not let me. They want my scalp, but they shall not have it. My horse is sick, and I fear he will die. Can Antuga cure him?"

Antuga gazed at the bronzed-faced man for a few moments in profound silence, and said:

"Where horse?"

"Over there," pointing toward Ben Hornady and the sick horse. Antuga started toward the creek.

Carson, to save the old man from getting his feet wet, took him in his arms, just as he was about to step into the water, and carried him over to the other side.

"The young paleface is strong," said the old medicine man, as Kit stood him on his feet again.

"But not as strong as Antuga was in the days of his youth," returned Carson.

The old man shook his head and made no reply, but went directly over to where the faithful Rocket was rolling on the ground in the agonies of an excruciating colic. He gazed intently at the horse for a minute or so, and then said:

"Go away—Antuga talk to horse."

"Come away, Ben," said Carson to his comrade. "He wants to conjure the horse."

Ben Hornady followed him across the creek, leading his own gallant steed by the bridle.

"What can he do?" Ben asked, when they were alone together.

"I don't know. Those old fellows have secrets which they are smart enough to keep to themselves, and pretend that they have supernatural powers. Don't let him see that you doubt his wonderful powers—if he does the horse any good."

"Oh, I'll swallow him and his yarn," said Ben, as they strolled off into the timber together.

Old Antuga went up to the prostrate horse and commenced talking to him in an unmeaning jargon, at the same time taking a handful of small dried and broken leaves from a pocket or bag attached to his dress and forcing them into his mouth.

The horse could not do otherwise than chew and swallow them, as they were not bad in taste. In a few minutes he foamed quite freely at the mouth, but seemed to be easier and suffering less pain.

In the meantime the old Indian kept up the unmeaning jargon-talk, making passes with his hands over the whole body of the animal.

Ten minutes later the horse was on his feet, feeling almost as well as ever.

The old medicine man gave a signal whistle, and Carson and Hornady returned to him.

"Hanged if the horse isn't up again!" exclaimed Ben.

"Yes. I expected it," quietly remarked Carson. "I've seen old Antuga do several little things of that kind."

"Well, it is wonderful!"

"These old men know a great deal about certain herbs and leaves, which they keep a profound secret to themselves."

"Sharp old coons," remarked Ben.

"Antuga is great medicine," said Carson, as he came up to the old Indian's side. "I will not forget his kindness."

"Antuga is glad he came in time," said the old man, very quietly, "for now the young paleface can go away and not meet the young warriors of his tribe. Go! Antuga has spoken."

Kit Carson shook hands with the old man, and was about to spring into his saddle, when the war-whoop of a dozen dusky warriors broke out on the still air of the afternoon, followed by the appearance of the warriors themselves.

In a flash the two scouts were surrounded. The warriors flourished their tomahawks and threatened the instant destruction of the two whites.

"At 'em, Ben!" cried Carson, shooting one with his rifle, stabbing another to the heart with his bowie, and braining a third with his gun.

It was done so quick the savages were taken all aback.

They did not anticipate any resistance to such overwhelming numbers, and were therefore amazed at seeing three of their number almost instantly slain.

Ben Hornady was a tough customer also. On seeing Carson show fight, he instantly fired, and then clubbed his rifle.

One blow of the heavy steel barrel never failed to crush whatever part of the human body it came in contact with; so in another half minute two more savages were sent whirling into the Happy Hunting Ground.

"Give it to 'em, Rocket!" said Carson to his faithful horse, and the next moment Rocket's heels were flying in every direction. So were the Indians. It was more than they could stand.

"Into the saddle, Ben!" cried the great scout again, springing lightly upon the back of the faithful horse and darting away at full speed.

CHAPTER II.

THE RESCUE AND O'NEILL'S REVENGE.

BEN HORNADY lost no time in following Carson. They both knew that there were more Indians nearby, and that their safety lay in instant and rapid flight. They might have held their own against the first attacking party and beaten them off. But the others would have fired on them, and, maybe, kill them.

Once in the saddle those brave scouts had no fear of all the redmen of the West.

With wild whoops of rage and hate the savages fired a scattering volley at the retreating scouts. Luckily they were not hit, though the bullets came uncomfortably close to their heads.

Then followed a rattling pursuit. The redskins were in fine trim for the chase. Their horses were comparatively fresh, and so they dashed forward with a good hope of being able to run down and capture the two daring men alive.

Carson's horse, faithful Rocket, was not yet well enough to stand the strain of a long, fierce chase. No man understood the capabilities of a good horse better than Kit Carson did. He knew that in a ten-mile run Rocket would break down.

"Ben," he said, "we must turn down to the right there and take to the timber. Rocket is not well enough for this thing. The sun is going down. In another hour the stars will be out. We can dodge them easily in the timber then."

"Lead the way, Kit," replied Ben. "I'm with you to the death. There's another gang with them now. Lord, how they do howl!"

"Yes; there's a whole band of them. Come on now."

The timber on the right was not more than a mile away. The pursuers were not more than a quarter of a mile behind, and were actually gaining on them.

The moment they turned toward the timber the Indians divined their object, and made the welkin ring with their howls and whoops. They turned also and made desperate efforts to reach the timber at the same time, and thus head them off and force an unequal fight upon them.

"Hold out just a minute longer, good Rocket," said Carson to his faithful horse, "and then I'll work to save you in the timber."

"They are gaining on us, Kit!" said Ben.

"Yes—but we'll beat 'em, Bek," was the quiet reply. Carson then turned in the saddle and aimed his unerring rifle at the foremost of his pursuers and fired.

The savage gave a death whoop and reeled on his horse like a drunken trooper. A few more bounds of his horse, and he fell to the ground to rise no more.

Carson never missed his aim when he pulled the trigger of his trusty rifle.

When they reached the thicket the twilight was deepening fast. The stars were beginning to peep out of the clear sky, and, as our heroes well knew, it would soon be too dark for any trail to be followed in the timber.

"Right behind me, Ben," called Carson to his companion, as he led off through the timber. "They can't follow our trail over ten or fifteen minutes."

"Lead on—I'm with you," was Ben's reply, and both men urged their horses through the timber as fast as the nature of the obstacles in the way would permit.

Presently it grew so dark under the gloomy shadow of the trees that Carson was sure the redskins could not find their trail. He stopped and listened to the yells of the Indians. He knew what every sound meant.

If an Indian was successful, his yells indicated his triumph. If disappointed, his whoop failed not to express his feelings. Carson and Hornady understood the language of Indian yells and whoops as well as the savages themselves.

"They have lost the trail," he said, after listening several minutes.

"Yes," said Ben, "and they are mad as hornets about it."

"Of course they are. We can double on them now, and go back up the stream and see what this excursion means."

Both men dismounted and walked slowly along through the timber. They did not need to lead their horses. The faithful animals were too well trained for that. The horses followed close behind them, ready to obey every call on the instant.

After walking a mile or so, they concluded to stop and let their horses rest. Rocket was evidently not himself, and Kit Carson was too humane a man not to give him a chance to recover his wonted strength before putting his endurance to the test again.

They had rested some three hours or so, when the keen ears of the two scouts detected the sound of voices on the other side of the creek. They were faint and indistinct, owing to distance, but still they could recognize the human voice.

"That must be another party," suggested Ben, in a whisper.

"Yes," replied Kit, "and maybe they are of another tribe."

"Let's find out about that."

"All right. Wait here till I come back," and rising to his feet, he glided away in the dark like a shadowy specter.

Crossing the creek, he proceeded in the direction of the voices, and soon came in sight of a camp-fire.

They were a party of Indians of the same tribe of those he and Ben Hornady had just escaped from.

Around the fire were seven stalwart redmen and two prisoners—white men—whom Carson instantly recognized as two hunters living some fifty miles above Fort Laramie.

The prisoners were bound hands and feet, and the savages amused themselves by touching them with the burning ends of sticks. Every time a prisoner winced or squirmed the red fiends would scream with laughter.

Carson was too indignant to remain long an idle spectator of such a scene as that. He hurried back to the creek and signaled to Ben Hornady to join him.

Ben came quickly forward.

"What is it, Kit?" he asked.

"Dick Mason and Tom O'Neill are prisoners over there," was the

whispered reply. "Seven redskins have got them, and they are being tortured with burning sticks."

"Burning blazes!" hissed Ben. "They once served me that way up on the Yellowstone. I know what it is. What the sly old redskins don't know about torturing a prisoner nobody else does."

"Come on, and let's see if we can't help 'em. They are brave fellows, both of them."

The two men then crept away in the darkness, and glided toward the camp-fire like two avenging specters.

As they neared the fire they heard the savages burst into a loud laugh.

"Tare an' 'ounds!" they heard Tom O'Neill say, "av ye bloody hathins will ontie me hands I'll bather ther loife out av ye!"

"Ugh!" grunted one of the redskins, "paleface heap talk. May be he talk too much. Injun make him cry like pappoose."

And with that he touched him with the burning end of a stick again.

"Och, ye bloody hathin!" cried Tom, suddenly squirming around, for he was lying flat on his back, "take that for yer share," and drawing up both feet he planted a double blow on the red savage's stomach that shut him up like a jack-knife, and landed him utterly insensible right in the middle of the fire.

With loud laughter the other six pulled their comrade out of the fire, and found that he was more dead than alive.

"Now, Ben," whispered Carson, aiming his unerring rifle at one of the wretches.

Two rifles rang out their death cracks on the night air, and two Indians hurried away into the happy hunting grounds of Indian mythology.

The next moment they dashed in, pistol in hand, and shot down two more—leaving only three out of a party of seven—one of whom was yet unconscious from the tremendous kick he had received in the stomach.

The other two showed fight, but were quickly knocked down and disarmed.

"Praise all the saints!" cried Tom O'Neill, "but Kit an' Ben are ther b'yes. Whoop! Cut me loose, Ben, me darlint!"

Ben Hornady drew his knife and cut the cords that bound the two daring young hunters, and they sprang to their feet.

"God bless you, Ben—Kit!" cried Dick Mason, grasping a hand of each. "I couldn't have stood it much longer. I never could stand fire. I don't know how the devil and I will get along together."

"Whoop!" yelled Tom, dancing around like a wild lunatic. "Give me ther devil's pitchfork! Gimme ther hot lead! I'll make ther red sons of the witches' pot howl with fun. Whoop! Tipperary foriver!"

The two disarmed redskins were just recovering from the stunning blows that had laid them out on the grass. Tom took a stick with a live coal end to it and stuck it against the naked side of one of them. The savage leaped about five feet in the air, and gave a grunt that filled Tom with unbounded delight.

"Och, me darlint, but it's foine fun we're afther havin' wid yer!" he cried. "Begorra, yer can lape higher nor the biggest frog in ther swamp. Now lape!"

And he applied the burning end of the stick again to the redskin's exposed person.

"Ugh!" and another leap.

The next moment the aborigine made a dash for liberty. Tom was on the lookout for something of the kind, and darted after him.

He caught him and brought him back to the fire.

"By the piper that played afore Moses!" he exclaimed, "but it's the big fun O'll have wid yer, or me name isn't Tom O'Nale, sure!"

He tied the redskin to a sapling, and then went for the one he had kicked into the fire, who was beginning to recover. Him he tied up alongside the other one, Carson and Hornady looking on with no little amusement.

Dick Mason had also secured the other savage, and had placed several sticks in the fire.

"Boys, you are not savages," remarked Kit Carson.

"Ain't Oi?" exclaimed Tom. "Bedad, Oi can prove it!" and taking a burning stick he rubbed it against the coppery hide of one of the prisoners. "Will yez ask him now? Bedad, av he don't call me a haythin O'll burn a hole through him!"

"But you don't want to be a savage, Tom," protested Kit, who never approved of torturing a prisoner, no matter how much torture may be deserved.

"Let him have his revenge, Kit," said Ben Hornady. "The redskins once tortured me upon the Yellowstone. I caught one of the rascals a year afterward, and I blistered him from head to foot."

"Faith," said Tom, "it's a rale ould Injun I am just now—whoop!" And taking another burning stick from the fire he made marks all over the body of the one he had kicked before he was rescued.

"How do yez loike it, ye red hathin? Faith, it's ice crame to what yez will get when ould Nick gets ye! Ha, ha, ha! Isn't it foine now? Bedad, but I want yez ter come and see me agin! It's proud av yer acquaintance I am!"

"Ugh!" grunted the squirming savage. "Paleface heap talk."

"Av course. Redskin heap squirm, an' think heap much. Ha, ha, ha! Luck at that now! Paleface heap laugh, too!"

Carson and the others could not refrain from laughter. O'Neill was avenging his burns with a vengeance. He made the wiry red rascals squirm like worms on a fish-hook. No human fortitude can long withstand fire. The will may suppress and control for a while, but when the excruciating point is reached the fire conquers.

Dick Mason gave the other prisoner some of the same sauce he had

been forced to take, but he soon relented and threw away the burning stick.

"Bedad, I'll make him ate it," said Tom, taking up another burning fagot and thrusting the blazing end in the rascal's mouth.

The redskin grunted, groaned, and finally howled.

"Come, Tom, that'll do!" cried Kit Carson, sternly.

"Whose prisoners are they?" Tom demanded.

"Mine!" was the reply.

"Bedad, thin, yez can have 'em." And Tom threw down the burning stick and selected his rifle and powder horn from the arms of the savages. "It's a dirthy, hathin set they are, the spalpeens!"

Dick then explained how he and Tom had been treacherously attacked and captured while attending to their traps some distance up stream that day.

"The red rascals are on the warpath again," he said, "and they'll take many whites unawares who do not know of this outbreak. There are not less than a dozen wagon trains within a hundred miles of this timber."

"I fear you are right, Dick," said Kit Carson. "And there are many women and children with those trains. Some of them will never live to return to their homes again."

Just then a signal as of a night-bird was heard below them, and the four white men glided away into the bushes, so as to be out of the light of the camp-fire.

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD TRAPPER'S CABIN.

THE signal came from an Indian. Every old trapper and hunter knew the Indian signals when they heard them. The savages sometimes caught the trappers' signals, but they never used them with their own people.

The three savages were left where they had been bound, and they returned signals that warned those in the woods to be cautious.

Silence reigned in the woods for nearly an hour, and then keen-eyed Kit Carson detected the dark form of an Indian crawling along on the ground, serpent-like, toward the sapling to which one of the prisoners was bound.

Slowly and silently he crept forward, and just as he reached up his hand to cut the cords the whip-like crack of Carson's rifle rang out on the still night air, and the creeping savage had a broken right arm for his pains.

The Indian lay perfectly still, afraid to move lest another bullet should do still more harm.

The Indians were nonplused, and didn't know what to do. Two of their number went around to the rear to get the whites between them and the light. But Ben Hornady suspected something of the kind after Kit Carson's shot had betrayed their position.

He had been standing under the protecting gloom of a large tree some half an hour, when a dark shadow brushed past him. He instantly knew it was an Indian.

Drawing his hunting knife, he sprang forward and buried it to the hilt in the body of the savage, who uttered a piercing yell and staggered forward and fell, to rise no more forever.

The welkin rang with the yells of the savages on the further side of the camp-fire, and seemed on the point of making a charge for the rescue of their companions.

"Ben," whispered Kit, "we'd better get our horses before they fall into the redskins' hands."

"Yes, and then slip away. The timber is full of redskins to-night."

"You are right. I'll speak to Dick and Tom."

Kit glided from one to the other of the brave trappers, and told them of the plan to secure their horses and get away.

"Bedad!" whispered O'Neill, in no little disgust, "it's an illegant ruction yez are shpollin', Mr. Carson."

"Another time, Tom," replied Kit, "will do as well."

"Faith, we won't have so many to work on nixt toime, I'm thinkin'."

"Plenty of them around. Come on and get your horse."

Kit led the way, and soon the four men were in among the horses, which happened to be on the farther side from that of the Indians.

"Lead them carefully away," whispered Kit, "till we are out of hearing of the camp."

He then pushed cautiously northward from the camp till they were at least a half mile from the camp where the Indians still supposed them to be.

"Now we can mount," said Kit Carson, as they reached the edge of the timber. "We are out of the woods."

"How's Rocket?" Hornady asked.

"All right, I think," was the reply, as the scout sprang into the saddle.

The other three followed, and then they moved off across the open prairie toward another piece of timber some seven miles away.

"We managed that very well, I think," said Ben.

"Yes," answered Kit, "and the Indians have done badly."

"Bedad," exclaimed Tom, "av they got any sinse they'd be afther goin' home ag'in, ther haythin spalpeens! By the great shillelah, but av yer'd lave me alone I'd er burned up three av ther wretches!"

"Kit," said Ben, turning suddenly to the great scout, "old Nick Wadly's cabin is in that timber out there, you know, and I think we ought to go by and let 'em know the pesky varmints are on the warpath again."

"Ah! you are right, Ben. I had forgotten old Nick Wadly. He

used to be one of the best trappers in this part of the country. I haven't seen him since last fall."

"I saw him last week," said Dick Mason.

"How was he?"

"Tough as wire grass."

"And pretty Sarah?"

"Pretty as the rose and as laughing as a sunbeam," was the reply.

"Ah! young man," laughed Kit Carson, "it was the pretty Sarah you saw, and not her old father."

"Bedad, but you're roight," said Tom. "It was meself that saw the ould man."

"Oh, thunder, Tom!" exclaimed Dick, "didn't I have to put up a job on you to get a chance to speak to her myself?"

"Av coorse ye did, bad luck to ye!" laughed Tom, "an' a nate job it was."

"Oho!" and Kit Carson looked from one to the other of the young men as they rode along under the soft light of the stars. "I see that the old man's cabin will have some visitors who will seek to rob him of his greatest treasure. Well, I don't blame you, boys. Sarah Wadly is a sweet girl, who will make any good man happy. I think I would be tempted to kill the man who would be unkind to her."

"Ah! you're stuck there yerself!" exclaimed Tom.

"Yes, I am a friend of pretty Sarah's, and the man who wins her hand, and then ill-treats her, must be responsible to me. God help him when I call him to account."

"Amen!" exclaimed Ben Hornady. "A better girl than Sarah never lived."

On the way across the prairie toward the timber where stood the cabin of old Nick Wadly and his wife and daughter, the little party suddenly found themselves intercepted by a band of Indians who were coming directly across their path.

"We must go back!" whispered Kit Carson. "That party is too strong for us."

"Yes, there's a score of them at least," remarked Ben.

"Come away, quick! Ah, we are discovered! Come on! Let's lead them away from Wadly's place!"

Kit Carson dashed off in an almost opposite direction from Wadly's, which was now only about three miles away. The others followed.

The savages saw them in the shadowy dimness of the night, and started in pursuit. Their yells broke rudely on the still air of the night, but that served only to quicken the speed of the party of whites.

Some three miles away, in the direction they were then going, the scouts knew there was a heavy piece of timber. To gain that and seek seclusion in its dark shadows was their object now.

But a few minutes elapsed ere the timber was in sight and then the pursuers were actually out of sight.

"Under the shadow of these trees," said Kit Carson, "we can slip down on the edge of the timber a mile or two and leave the redskins watching around here. Come on."

They knew that Kit knew always just what he was doing, and so they followed him blindly. Down along the edge of the timber, under the dark shadow of the trees, they passed, until at least a mile and a half had been traversed.

"Ah! that leaves them hugging the timber," remarked Ben.

"Yes. We can now go across to Wadly's timber. I think the sooner we tell him of his danger the better. Come on; it's only four miles across here now."

They again started across the open prairie toward Nick Wadly's place, which was not far from the river.

In a half hour they had reached the timber, and leaving their horses in a secure place, went forward on foot to the cabin, which was rather difficult of approach from that side.

But they soon came to the spring which supplied the family with water, and under the soft starlight Kit Carson discovered moccasin tracks in the damp earth around it.

"They have been here," he whispered. "Keep still and listen."

They could hear nothing, but still they felt that danger was in the very air.

Motioning to his companions to follow him, Kit started up the hill toward the cabin. Something induced him to go to the rear and peep through a crevice.

The picture he saw there almost made his hair stand on end.

In a large, rude chair of his own construction, before the smoldering embers of the fire on the broad open hearth, sat old Nick Wadly, fast asleep, his chin resting on his bosom. At his feet lay his pipe, which had fallen from his lips.

Near his side, in a big arm-chair, also fast asleep, sat his faithful old wife. Her head was leaning back against the top of the chair, the picture of a sweet, dreamful sleep resting about her and the old man.

On a lounge at the further end of the room reclined Sarah Wadly, the nineteen-year-old daughter of the old couple. It was a soft, elegant couch of bearskins and buffalo robes. Her splendid figure reclined at ease, and that sleeping face was that of an angel. Her long brown ringlets hung over the end of the lounge and swept the floor.

All that was beautiful to look upon. It was peace, innocence, beauty and contentment combined. But a change came over it all even as the daring scout looked upon it.

A window on the opposite side of the cabin had been softly opened, and the form of a hideous war-painted savage intruded.

He crept softly toward the old man, who was sleeping as sweetly as a babe, drew his hunting-knife and held it in position to strike should he awake.

Another crept forward with cat-like step, and held his knife near

the exposed throat of the old wife of the trapper, and seemed to wait for the others.

Still another, a young chief crept, serpent-like, toward the couch of Sarah Wadly. She was too beautiful in her innocent sleep even for a savage to look upon, and he paused to gaze upon the picture. His eyes glowed and his heart throbbed as he glared at the prize. But, as if urged by some unseen power, he glided forward until he stood directly over the beautiful maiden, and then raised his hunting-knife above his head.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIGHT FOR THE CABIN.

THE situation was a terrible one indeed.

To Kit Carson and his friends the Wadlys appeared to be doomed. Their lives seemed to hang in the balance. The savage butchers stood as if waiting for the signal to begin their horrible work.

Over the heads of the sleeping victims were held scalping-knives that had often reeked with human gore!

But the signal came not.

Another savage appeared at the window, and climbed through it with soft, stealthy, cat-like movements. Another appeared at the window who seemed to be a lookout. He motioned to the other to open the door, and then disappeared from the window.

The other glided softly to the door and removed the bar, but another horribly painted face appeared at the window and peered within, as if expecting to witness a bloody butchery.

All this took place within the space of one or two minutes. Kit Carson and his friends in the rear of the cabin, were silent witnesses of the scene. But they were quickly prepared for bloody work.

On seeing the bar removed from the door, Kit quickly motioned the others to follow him, and glided like a shadowy specter round the house.

These daring spirits never hesitated to follow where another dared to lead. Ben Hornady crept close behind, and Dick and Tom followed close upon their heels.

At the front of the cabin they saw only one Indian, who stood at the window looking on the scene within. So soft and cat-like was their tread, that their presence was not suspected.

Raising his hand as a signal to his three comrades to follow him, Kit Carson pushed open the door and dashed into the cabin. The three followed, and in another instant the four savages were covered by the unerring rifles of the scouts.

"Surrender!" cried Kit, in thunder tones.

The savages were utterly astounded.

They wheeled about and stood face to face with the muzzles of the rifles, their hideously painted faces betraying how completely they were surprised.

"Ugh!" grunted the chief, "palefaces!"

Kit Carson's voice woke up the three sleepers. Old Nick Wadly looked around in a dazed sort of way, rubbed his eyes with his brawny fist, looked again, and then sprang to his feet.

"Great b'ars!" he exclaimed, "Injuns!"

His old wife sprang up and yelled "Scat!" and Sarah sprang from her couch with a piercing scream.

Leaning against the side of the open fire-place stood a heavy wood-chopper's ax.

Old Nick Wadly mechanically reached forward and grasped it in his right hand. With one tremendous swing he brought the ax down on the unprotected head of the Indian nearest to him, and another savage spirit took its flight to the happy hunting grounds.

"Bedad!" exclaimed Tom O'Neill, "that was nately done, Mr. Wadly!"

And then he wheeled and fired at the Indian at the window, sending a ball crashing through his brain.

In another minute Sarah Wadly had entirely recovered her self-possession. Just above her couch hung a small rifle, with which she had often killed deers and other game. To reach up and secure the rifle was but a moment's work. The next moment it was leveled at the breast of the savage, who had held his scalping knife over her as she slept.

"Don't shoot him," said Kit; "I guess he will surrender!"

But the wily savage had no such idea; without uttering a word he sprang towards the door, intending to escape by flight.

"Oh, don't be afther laying us that way," said Tom. "Just lave us a lock of your hair," and with that, he planted a blow between his eyes that sent the redskin all in a heap in the corner of the room.

Old Nick Wadly and Ben Hornady then seized the other two, and disarmed them.

"That's all, I believe," said Kit Carson quietly; "there were only five of them."

"Kit," said Wadly, grasping the hand of the great scout, "I am in your debt again."

"Well," replied Kit, "maybe you'll get a chance to square it up, old man."

"Ef I do, I'll pay the hull of it, Kit!"

"I know you will, Nick, for you were never known to go back on a friend!"

"That's it," said the old man, and then turning, he grasped the hand of Ben Hornady, exclaiming: "How are you, Ben? You were just in time!"

"Yes," replied Ben; "you were in a tight place, old man!"

Mrs. Wadly and Sarah, with tears of joy in their eyes, thanked the four brave scouts again and again.

"Oh, Mr. Carson!" cried pretty Sarah, "this is the second time you saved us!"

"Is that all?" he asked laughingly; "it is such a pleasant duty I'd like to save you every day in the year."

"Just luk at them!" exclaimed Tom. "Bedad, he wants the best part of the job; faith an' it's twice a day I'd save you!"

Sarah blushed and laughed, and extended her hand to the gallant Irishman.

"I'm sure I'd feel safe with any of you," she said.

"Hark!" exclaimed Ben Hornady. "I heard a signal!"

In an instant all was silent.

The hooting of an owl was heard in the timber above the cabin.

The next moment the short, sharp bark of the coyote was heard from one of the Indian prisoners.

The savage had signaled to his comrades.

"Blast yer ugly picter!" exclaimed old Nick Wadly, seizing his ax and dashing out the brains of the redskin; "try that on again, will ye!"

Undismayed by the fate of their comrade, the other two Indians repeated the signals, which were instantly answered back from the timber.

"By all the cats of Kilkenny!" exclaimed Tom O'Neill, "that's the last bark you red haythens will be afther making," and he plunged his knife to the hilt in the bosom of the redskin.

At the same instant, Wadly had settled the other with his ax, and thus they were rid of their prisoners.

"Put them outside as quickly as possible," suggested Kit Carson, and the scouts went quickly to work to remove them.

"Now, Wadly," said Kit, "there are many redskins about to-night; close your door and fasten your window. We will take to the timber and take care of the outside, while you attend to the cabin. Your wife and daughter know how to shoot, so I guess we can manage these wretches."

"You will come in again?" asked Sarah.

"Yes," replied Kit, "when we have driven the Indians away."

"Oh, you will soon do that," she said, "for they are afraid of you."

Just then another signal was heard, and Kit turned to his comrades with:

"Come; we must get to the timber before they get to the cabin."

He led the way out, the others following, and Wadly closed the door and made fast the window.

The four scouts crept stealthily into the timber, where, under the dark shadow of the trees, they could see everything in the little clearing around the cabin without themselves being seen.

Scarcely were they settled in their hiding-place, ere a half dozen dark, shadowy forms emerged from the forest on the opposite side of the clearing and approached the cabin.

Their step was as noiseless as the panther's. Not a sound was heard from them until they reached the five dead bodies of their comrades lying a few feet from the cabin door. The sight of those bodies seemed to disturb them to an unusual degree. They were destined to be still more disturbed, for the next moment, much to the surprise of the scouts in the timber, three rifle shots rang out on the still night. The Wadly family had begun the circus, and three Indians began the dance of death.

Three death yells answered the shots, and three shadowy forms reeled backwards half way toward the edge of the timber, and fell to rise no more.

The other three Indians fled quickly back, making the welkin ring with their yells, which were answered by others farther up in the timber.

"Why, the woods must be full of them," whispered Dick Mason.

"Bedad," responded Tom, "there's eight of them dead already, me darlint!"

"Be quiet," whispered Kit; "they don't suspect our presence in the timber, and will try to burn the cabin."

"They'll have a swate time of it," remarked Tom.

The yells up in the timber told of the presence of nearly two score more of the redskins.

They no longer made any attempt to conceal their presence. Their howls of rage transformed their quiet forest to a pandemonium of hate and vengeance. They came rushing down upon the cabin, and fired a score of shots at the door and window, but the heavy oaken timber protected the inmates, who responded with three more fatal shots.

Trusting to their numerical strength they sought to break in the door by mere weight of numbers, but it resisted all their efforts.

Crack, crack, crack! went the three rifles within, and three more of the red demons bit the dust. Still they struggled against the door. Enraged at their failure to break it down, they drew their tomahawks and began hacking at it.

"Now, we had better take a hand in this," whispered Kit Carson to his three friends at his side. They rose up in the bushes, and leveled their rifles at the backs of the struggling savages. The four shots made but one report, but each bullet found a lodgment in the back of a redskin.

They heard the shots, but as their backs were turned to the scouts at the time, they did not see the flash of the guns, hence they were uncertain as to the exact location of their unknown enemies. They paused in their attack upon the cabin door, and glared around them like wild beasts at bay.

A few moments later three more shots from within caused them to return and renew their attack upon the door. Their sharp tomahawks

rattled like hail against the oaken timbers, and chips flew in every direction.

It was only a question of time as to the result, if they were allowed to continue to thus use their tomahawks.

But Kit Carson and his friends were not the men to allow such work, and four more rifle shots convinced the savages that they were enemies without as well as within the cabin.

On receiving the second volley in the rear, the redskins wheeled and darted back to the edge of the timber. At least half of them rushed in upon the four scouts.

"Begorra!" exclaimed Tom O'Neill, "here's an illegant ruction, b'ys," and dropping his rifle he drew his hunting knife, and went in with a wild Irish yell.

"Whoop, Tipperary forever!" he cried, and in another moment the other three scouts were laying about them with an energy that made sad havoc in the ranks of the redskins.

The Indians were fearfully demoralized. They could form no idea of the numerical strength of the scouts. They only knew that half their number were killed or wounded, and yet they had not obtained even a glimpse of their enemies.

A sudden panic seized them, and they fled through the timber, uttering yells that fully betrayed the completeness of their defeat.

CHAPTER V.

TOM'S WOUND—CLEARING AWAY THE WORK.

WHEN the redskins took to their heels, Tom O'Neill, in his great joy at their defeat, darted away across the clearing in pursuit of a stalwart Indian, with whom he wanted to have a trial of strength, knowing that pretty Sarah Wadly would be an eye witness of the combat.

He overtook the Indian just before he reached the edge of the timber, and seized him around the waist.

"Whoop!" he yelled. "Ould Ireland forever!" and gathering his strength for a tremendous exertion, he hurled the brawny savage several feet in the air.

The redskin fell sprawling on the ground in spread eagle style, and gave a grunt that made the others roar with laughter.

"Do yer moind that now, yer red haythin!" cried Tom, dancing around the savage, as he was trying to pull himself together again. "Come up now and try some more! Begorra, it's meself that is afther tashin' yez how to foight!"

"Look out, there, Tom!" cried Dick Mason, darting forward to the assistance of the jolly young Irishman.

But he was too late. A stalwart savage had darted out of the bushes behind him, and gave him a blow on the back of his head with his tomahawk.

Poor Tom staggered forward, and fell across the Indian he had thrown over his head.

"Blast yer yellow hide!" hissed Dick Mason, closing with the savage in a death struggle, "that was a cowardly blow! Try—it—on—me!"

"Ugh! Me take scalp!" grunted the Indian, boldly closing with the young hunter.

The struggle was a short one, for Dick got his knife under the redskin's fifth rib, and made short work of him.

In the meantime, the Indian who had been so unceremoniously tossed by Tom, managed to throw him off and rise to his knees.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "Me take scalp now!" and drawing his knife, he got his fingers in Tom's hair, and was about to cut the scalp, when Ben Hornady rushed forward and brained him with his rifle barrel.

Just then Dick Mason turned around, his knife dripping with blood, and said:

"This is terrible work. I would rather have lost my right arm than lose poor Tom. He was as brave a fellow and as true a friend as ever lived!"

"It's unfortunate, indeed," remarked Kit Carson, coming up to where Tom was lying with his face to the ground. "It was all because he ran out into the clearing before the enemy had gone away. I am sorry—very sorry!"

The door of the cabin opened, and Sarah Wadly ran out.

"Who's hurt?" she cried.

"Poor Tom is dead," mournfully replied Dick Mason.

"Oh, my God!" she cried, clasping her hands. "Why could I not have died for him?"

"By me sowl!" exclaimed Tom, slowly rising to a sitting posture, "I'm not dead yet! But it's meself as would die ivery day just ter hear them funeral spaches!"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried Sarah, leaping around like a young child for joy. "He's not dead—he's not dead!"

"Tom—pard!" cried Dick Mason, grasping his hand, "how is it? I thought you had passed in your chips!"

"Not yit, bedad!" replied the sturdy Irishman. "Some bloody ould haythin hut me a whack on me head!"

"One struck you with a tomahawk," replied Dick.

"And the other tried to get your scalp," said Hornady. "He had his fingers in your hair."

Tom mechanically felt of his head, and found it covered with blood.

"Begorra," he said, "the haythin gaw me a hard whack!"

"Come in an' let's see how badly you are hurt," said old Nick Wadly, leading him back toward the cabin.

Kit Carson, Ben, and Dick remained outside to see that no more Indians were lurking about, and the old man took charge of Tom.

In the cabin the mother and daughter made a bright light, by the aid of which the old man examined the wound.

"Why, hanged if you haven't made a narrow escape, my boy!" exclaimed the old man. "The tomahawk merely grazed your head chipping upon the scalp a bit."

"Stunned me then, eh?"

"That's all."

"Whoop? Ireland foriver!" yelled Tom, springing to his feet. "Show me the red nagur that but me!"

"They are all gone now," said Sarah. "Oh, I am so glad it's no worse, Mr. O'Neill!"

"So am I, me darlint," said Tom, in the greatest good humor. "Faith, I'm glad the red nagur didn't kill me intoirely."

From blushing at being called "me darlint," Sarah drifted into a silvery laugh at his quaint humor.

"You'd better wash the blood out of your hair, Mr. O'Neill," remarked Mrs. Wadly. "You will feel better then."

Sarah procured a basin of water for him, and in a few minutes Tom was himself again.

Ben Hornady and Dick Mason followed the Indians three or four miles, and saw that they were on their way to another piece of timber, having had enough of the Wadly cabin racket. They then returned to where Kit Carson was keeping watch and guard.

"They are gone, pard," said Ben.

"Sick," said Mason, sententiously.

"Let's go to the house, then," and Carson led the way back to the cabin where Sarah and her mother had cooked a bountiful supper of venison steaks, bread and coffee.

"I've got the appetite of a horse," said Dick, as he entered the hut and inhaled the savory odors of the cooking.

"Faith, thin, ye'll ate grass for yer supper," replied Tom. "Horses don't ate matel"

"They eat cabbage-heads sometimes, pard," returned Dick, good-naturedly, "so look out for yourself."

"My cabbage is afther being too hard for yer tathe, me bye," and Sarah, who was at that moment thinking of that hard head of his, burst into another one of those silvery laughs, which sounded like music on the still night air.

"Come, pards," said Kit Carson to his comrades, "we must put these redskins out of the way. It won't do to leave them lying around here this way."

There were so many of them that it was a question what to do with them. There were but two picks and spades in the cabin. To dig a trench long enough and deep enough to bury all the slain of the redskins was indeed a task.

"Bedad!" said Tom, on looking around at the number, "it's a hard job we've got; but I'd rather bury them than let 'em bury me."

"That's my idea, too," said Dick Mason, picking up one of the spades and looking around as if in search of the place to begin work.

Old Nick Wadly went out and showed them a spot, some two hundred yards from the cabin, where, he said, he would prefer to have them planted.

But just then a vivid flash of lightning revealed the fact that a summer thunder stower was coming up.

"No use digging, boys," said Old Nick. "Just throw 'em in the creek hyer, and the rise'll take 'em away to the river."

"'Spose it don't rise?" Dick Mason asked.

"Then they won't go," dryly replied the old man.

The four men then went to work taking away the dead bodies of the Indians, and throwing them into the creek.

Before they were through the big drops began to fall. They fell heavy and scattering, a sure precursor of a heavy storm in that section.

"We must get our horses in under the trees near the house," suggested Kit Carson to Ben Hornady.

"I was thinking of that," he replied, "and will go after them."

"Hold on; I guess I had better go with you. It's not safe for one to go alone in these woods."

The two scouts went together, and found the four horses all right, just where they had left them.

Signaling to Rocket, the faithful horse came quickly to Kit's side. The others followed.

"They'll follow us," said Kit; "let's go back to the house."

They turned and led the way back. The horses followed them, and in a few minutes were under the great trees in the edge of the timber, near the cabin of Nick Wadly.

The saddles were taken off and carried into the house, where Dick and the others had brought the rifles and tomahawks of the dead Indians.

"Now we'll eat that supper," said Kit. "I believe our work is done for the night."

Mrs. Wadly and Sarah had washed away all the blood stains inside the house, and now, when the party sat down to the simple meal, there was nothing to cause them to eat less than their appetites craved.

They did full justice to the venison steaks and coffee, and ate like men who had earned their bread. It was a late supper, but none the less enjoyable on that account.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER THE STORM—SARAH WADLY—THE CAVE.

THE meal over, the party of scouts lit their pipes and proceeded to have a quiet smoke. The rain was now pouring down in torrents, making a roar that almost drowned their voices.

They well knew that no Indians would prowl in such a storm as that, and therefore did not put out a guard.

All their movements were based on a thorough knowledge of the Indian character. In that they were never mistaken.

Hour after hour the storm pelted the roof of the cabin. The family and the four scouts sat up and talked. They did not feel like sleeping.

Tom O'Neill, with a bandage around his head, placed there by the nut-brown hands of Sarah Wadly, sat near the young maiden, and talked in low tones. He wanted to be sentimental, but she would adroitly switch off on another tack, and thus stop him.

But an Irishman in love is hard to squelch. Tom was one of those bold, daring, frank kind of men one cannot help liking. He would talk on any subject she suggested, but would tinge it with the roseate coloring of his thoughts.

"Tom O'Neill," said Dick Mason, who was very much afraid the impulsive Irishman would get ahead of him, "there's no whispering allowed in this mess."

"Thin spake out loike a man, begorra," replied Tom, "an' don't be afther sitting there an' wishing yerself in me place."

The party chuckled, and Dick really wished he had kept his mouth shut.

"Come here and sit by me, Mr. Mason," said Sarah, when the laugh subsided. "I really don't think I ought to monopolize the attention of one gentleman all the time."

"Bedad, yer can hav' the whole av me!" protested Tom.

"But really, I want a part of Mr. Mason's time, too, Mr. O'Neill," said she. "You are pleasant company, and—"

"Be me sowl! that's the swatest worrud you've spoke ter-night. Whoop, pard, I'd loike to be lynched for marryin' her!"

"And I'd like to lynch you if you did," quietly responded Dick.

"Oh, Mr. Mason!" chided Sarah.

To prevent the possibility of a rupture between the two friends Kit Carson called both to listen to the roaring of the storm without, and said:

"I think it likely that our horses may be gone by morning."

"I'm sure mine will never leave me unless he is stolen," said Dick Mason.

"Faith, an' I'll bet ye," put in O'Neill, "that your horse is gone."

"And I'll wager that yours is, too, O'Neill," said Ben Hornady, winking at Sarah, who at once understood the situation. The next moment she got up and took a seat between her father and mother.

Tom and Dick tumbled to the racket, and silently submitted without uttering a word. They drew up nearer the fire and took part in the general conversation.

The creek below the house was now an angry, roaring torrent. It rushed past on its way to the river, carrying everything in its resistless sweep.

"It's carrying off them dead redskins," said old Nick Wadly, with considerable satisfaction in his tones, "as well as wipes out the blood stains. I'm glad it rained."

"So am I," remarked Ben Hornady, knocking the ashes from his pipe against his boot heel.

"Yes," remarked Kit Carson; "the redskins don't like storms like this."

At last the storm ceased. It went away as suddenly as it came, and only the roar of the creek was heard.

"I guess we may as well take a look at our horses," suggested Carson, rising and going to the door. "The rain has stopped."

Opening the door it was seen that another day was dawning.

"Why, I didn't know it was so late!" exclaimed Sarah Wadly, running to the door.

"No. Time flies fast when we take no note of it," he replied. "I am glad the night has gone, however."

They all stepped outside in the gray dawn of the morning and looked around the little clearing. The only evidences of the terrible combat of the night before were innumerable bullet holes on the front side of the cabin, and the cuts made by the tomahawks on the door and window.

Kit Carson gave a peculiar whistle, and a moment later Rocket came bounding out of the woods and put his head on his shoulder.

"How do you feel this morning, old friend?" the scout asked, patting his faithful animal affectionately on the neck.

The others called their horses to them and began to place their saddles on them. By the time they were ready to start Mrs. Wadly and Sarah had breakfast ready for them, and called them in to eat it. It was like the supper, simply venison steaks, coffee and bread; but they had appetites for it, and the steaks disappeared like snow before a furnace.

Breakfast over, the gallant scouts sprang into their saddles.

"Be on your guard, Wadly," cautioned Kit Carson, as he shook hands with the old pioneer. "The redskins are pretty thick down this way now."

"I'll do it, Kit," was the reply.

The next moment they were off.

"A brave set of men," commented the old man as he gazed after them.

"As gallant heroes as ever lived," said Sarah, by the side of her mother.

"That Kit Carson has a way of turning up just at the right time. God bless him!" remarked Mrs. Wadly.

"We must keep the door fastened after this," the old man said, "and let no one in till we know who he is. There'll be some more of the red varmints round hyer before long."

"Oh, I wish we could move further East," said Sarah. "We live in constant dread of being killed and scalped. It is not a pleasant life to live."

"We will not always live this way, my daughter," returned the old man. "Be patient, and some day, soon I hope, we'll go East to live and—die."

"Oh, I shall be so glad!" and she threw her arms around her father's neck and kissed him.

"I will try to be patient and wait, father," she said, "so don't mind me."

"I do mind you, daughter," he replied. "You are a good child, and I am a——"

"No, no, father," she interrupted him; "you are the best of fathers, and I will not complain. See how brown and strong I am getting! I can ride and shoot equal to the best man on the plains. Already several Indians have been slain by my rifle. Dear me! What will they think of me when we do go back?"

"They'll think as your mother and I, that you are the best girl in the world," replied the happy old father.

On leaving the Wadlys, Kit Carson took a northwesterly direction, intending to go in search of the Indians, and, if possible, find out their intentions. He was a scout for the government, and it was his duty to keep the officers at the military posts correctly informed as to the movements of the redskins.

But Dick and Tom were simply trappers and hunters. They had many traps to look after, and see that the Indians did not find and destroy them.

"We must go down the river," said Dick, "and look to our traps."

"And I must go up the river and watch the redskins," returned Kit Carson.

"Wish we could go with you," added Dick, "for you've done us a good turn. We'll come to you whenever and wherever you want us; eh pard?"

"Av coorse we will!" responded Tom O'Neill. "The ould divil himself couldn't kape me back, av yez wanted me."

"I know that well enough, boys," said Kit. "Let me give you a piece of good advice. Don't quarrel about Sarah Wadly."

Both blushed like school-children, and looked sheepish.

"She's too good for either of you," Kit added. "But don't quarrel about her. If she should be foolish enough to marry one of you, let the other congratulate both."

"Bedad, ye're roight," said Tom.

Dick Mason made no reply.

A moment later they parted. The two scouts rode away in search of the Indians, and the two hunters turned in the direction of the river.

Kit Carson and Ben Hornady rode across the prairie toward the piece of timber where they had met old Antaga the day before.

The great storm had entirely obliterated all traces of the Indian trail, hence they had no guide further than their knowledge of Indian habits and customs to go by.

Seven miles rapid riding brought them to the timber again. Somehow, Kit felt that the savages had spent the night in that timber. He knew where a large cavern afforded shelter for several hundred people, and he was quite sure the Indians knew of its existence also. The entrance was a narrow fissure between two walls of rock—just wide enough for one man to pass through at a time.

"The cave, Ben," he said to his companion. "They must have spent the night there."

"Yes, I was thinking of that."

"If we can get above the mouth of that cave we can shut in the whole party."

"Eh! Is that so?"

"Yes; there's a log lodged just above it that will fill the crevice."

"Let's see about it. We can leave our horses in the hollow."

Leaving their two horses in a hollow or thick swampy place, the two scouts crept forward, a half mile or more, toward the cave they were speaking about.

On reaching the place they saw smoke issuing from crevices above the rocks.

"They are in there cooking breakfast," said Ben.

"Yes," replied Kit, "and I see the log above the top of the entrance."

"Come on, quick, before anyone comes out."

Carson led the way round and upon the top of the rock, Ben keeping close on his heels. Every now and then they could hear the sound of voices coming up through the crevices.

At last they reached the log which was lodged just over the entrance to the cave. How it got there Kit Carson never knew, but he thanked his fortune on seeing it there.

Carefully measuring the distance, Kit Carson motioned to Ben to lend him a hand. They lifted it up by one end and let it slide down into the crevice. It dropped into the opening with a dull, grating sound, and lodged there as tight as a wedge.

A wall of despair and rage came up from the imprisoned red-

skins, but the daring scouts only smiled at the success of their scheme.

CHAPTER VII.

PUTTING THE REDSKINS IN A HOLE.

ON seeing the log come down into the narrow crevice, and finding themselves prisoners, the Indians howled like all possessed. They sprang up and ran forward, throwing themselves against the log with all their might. It was as immovable as the walls of stone on either side of it.

At several places they could run their hands through, but nowhere could they find a larger crevice than would admit the passage of a clenched fist. They were caged like so many rabbits.

"Hello, redskins!" cried Kit Carson from above, "open the door and let a fellow in."

They answered him with howls of rage, and cut madly on the log with their tomahawks.

"Oh, ye can't open it that way," cried Ben Hornady; "you could eat it quicker than you could chop it out."

"I guess we will have to wait until they get through with their howling."

"Yes," replied Ben, "and camp here until they are all dead or they come to terms."

"What's the use of making terms with redskins?" Kit asked; "they don't regard their word any more than a white man does."

"That's not to be wondered at, since every trader who comes out here lays himself out to cheat them out of all they have."

"That's so, Ben," assented Kit Carson; "still, if they will fight, we have got to kill or be killed."

"Oh, I am in favor of killing all the yellow cusses. They are like hornets, they begin their sociability at the wrong end."

"Yes, they begin by raising a fellow's hair, and then tomahawk him. If they won't keep quiet, we'll have to wipe 'em out. The only good Indian nowadays is a dead one."

In the meantime the imprisoned savages kept up a tremendous caterwauling. It was nearly an hour before they became quiet.

When they were quiet again, Kit Carson called out to them:

"Well, if you're through with that chin-music we'll talk a little business."

"Ugh!" grunted one of the imprisoned savages, "what paleface want?"

"I want to talk with you," said Kit Carson.

"Paleface got tongue, let him talk."

"Has the red man got ears? Can he hear?"

"Ugh! me hear," was the reply.

"How many of you are in there?"

"Too dark—Indian can't count."

"Light a candle, then," sung out Ben Hornady, to which they made no reply.

"Say, how many are there of you?"

"Paleface heap big fool; Indian no count in dark."

"Indian heap big lie!" returned Ben; "feel of your noses and count."

A long silence followed. The Indians seemed to hold a whispered consultation, after which the two scouts heard steady blows of a tomahawk on the log.

"They are going to try to cut their way out," said Kit.

"Only one at a time can get at it," Ben said, "and it would take a man a whole week to cut through that log in the position it is in."

"They might set it afire," suggested Kit.

"Yes," replied Ben, "an' it would burn like a chunk of ice."

"They will be pretty hungry when they get out, I am thinking."

"I guess we can bring them to terms if we only hold out."

Just then a rifle shot was heard, and a bullet whizzed through Kit Carson's hat.

Down both men dropped as if killed by the shot.

The Indians in the cave heard the shot, and whooped like so many demons.

"That was a close call," said Kit, running his finger through the bullet-hole in his hat. "Had it been an inch lower you would have been left here alone, Ben."

"A miss is as good as a mile," returned the other. "Where in thunder did that bullet come from?"

"Over on the left there."

Neither dared raise their heads above the rocks, which shielded them on every side, lest they expose themselves to another shot.

But where they lay they could have a view of the approaches to the entrance of the cave. Holding their rifles in readiness, the two scouts awaited developments.

The savages in the cave, convinced that the shot came from one of their friends, howled themselves hoarse. The scouts remained quiet, however, knowing that if the shot came from an Indian, he would soon make his appearance somewhere.

They were not mistaken. In about a half hour Ben Hornady discovered two Indians flitting from tree to tree, about fifty yards out in front of the cave.

"There they are," he whispered to Kit.

Kit raised his rifle, and aimed at a tree behind which one of them had concealed himself. Ben Hornady did the same. A few minutes later the tufted scalp-lock of one was seen slowly moving around the tree as if to take a peep at the situation.

Kit covered that head with his unerring rifle, and when enough of it was exposed to make sure of his aim, he pulled the trigger.

The Indian sprang up in the air like a frog, when pursued by a snake, and fell full length on the ground.

"That settles him," remarked Ben; "now let the other varmint show himself."

"Look out for him while I load again."

The other savage, knowing he was discovered, dared not look around the tree or attempt to escape.

"Now, Ben," said Kit, "I will crawl around to the right, and either get a shot at him or give you a chance."

"Go ahead," whispered Ben, "I'm ready for him."

Carson commenced creeping around to the right, and soon reached a point where the Indian behind the tree could see him. The redskin saw his danger, and at once took the only step that promised escape, and that was instant flight.

He sprang up and started to run across an opening. Kit and Ben both rose up and aimed at the wretch.

To confuse their aim, the wily savage turned a complete somersault, sprang to his feet again, and leaped around like a turkey on a hot oven, and then he dodged around, rolled over and over, threw himself into so many positions that the two scouts nearly split their sides with laughter.

"Go it, redskin," shouted Ben, "turn another somersault! Stand on your head. Be lively and show us what you can do."

As if to oblige the scout, the Indian treated them to a series of ground and lofty tumblings that would have done credit to a first-class circus performer. He would run a few paces and then spring into the air, throwing his limbs about in every direction. Then he would fall all in a heap, and roll over and over like a log, each moment getting further and further away.

Kit and Ben laughed heartily. "Let's follow him up," said Kit, "and see how long he will hold out at that."

They both ran down to the base of the bluff, and started toward the savage, who was making such desperate efforts to save himself.

Seeing them approach, the redskin ran a few paces and leaped over a big log, disappearing behind it. Fearing he might escape, they both dashed forward, reaching the log together.

To their utter amazement the redskin was nowhere to be seen.

"Great b'ars," said Ben, "where is the varmint?"

"That's what I am trying to find out," replied Kit, looking around him in a puzzled sort of way. "I don't see where he could have gone to."

They both stood upon the log and gazed around in every direction, but no Indian could they see.

"Well, by gum!" exclaimed Ben, "this kind of beats me. He must have crawled into some hole and pulled it in after him."

"Yes," said Kit, "he's found a hole somewhere, and that hole is what I am looking for."

They searched around and about the place, greatly puzzled at not being able to find any traces of the savage.

About twenty feet from where the savage leaped over the log lay another log which was quite hollow. A bush growing close to the end of it partially concealed the hollow from view.

Kit was standing near the bush, when he was startled by hearing a smothered sneeze behind him.

"Great coons!" he exclaimed, "the fellow is in the log."

And so he was.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BIG CHARGE FOR ONE MAN.

BEN HORNADY ran to the log and looked into the hollow. It was too dark for him to see any distance into it.

"Hello, redskin!" he said, "you'd better come out, I guess."

The Indian made no reply.

"Are you in there?" Ben asked.

No reply.

"Well, I'll see if you are, anyhow," and the scout pointed the muzzle of his rifle up the hollow.

"Ugh!" grunted the savage. "Paleface no shoot. Me come out."

"You are the most sensible redskin cuss I ever saw," remarked Ben. "Come out and let us get a look at you."

The Indian crawled out of the log, and stood with his arms folded across his brawny breast. Ben looked at him, and then burst into a hearty laugh at the recollection of the immense activity displayed by the rascal in trying to dodge the bullets that were aimed at him.

Now an Indian can stand anything but ridicule, which shows that he is possessed of a great deal of human nature.

The more Ben Hornady laughed the more dignity the Indian put on. At last Kit Carson had to put in a few hearty chuckles himself, which was more than the Indian could complacently endure.

"Ugh!" he said, contemptuously, "palefaces papposes—heap laugh."

"Yes, big Injun, big frog!" exclaimed Ben. "Heap big jump and run in log like lizard," and then he let out a regular horse laugh that might have been heard a half mile away in the forest.

Kit Carson laughed also, but not the red man. He couldn't see where the laugh came in. Any kind of an acrobatic feat that gave him a chance to save his life was entirely devoid of humor on his part.

"What shall we do with him, Kit?" Ben asked. "We don't want to be bothered with him."

"No, but to let him go will be to bring a war party down on us and rescue those in the cave."

"True. I guess I'd better make worms' meat of him."

"No, Ben, we can't do that," and the great scout shook his head.

"We can't murder prisoners unless it's to save our own lives."

"Tie him up then, and hold him till we have no need to keep him. Confound the red rascals, I hate to have anything to do with 'em!"

Kit Carson took some deer skin thongs and proceeded to tie the prisoner's hands behind his back.

"No tie," grunted the Indian. "Injun no run away."

"The red man's tongue is crooked. I cannot believe what he says," replied Kit, making the knot secure.

The proud redskin uttered not another word, but stood still and gazed toward the entrance to the cave. He had heard enough from that direction to reveal the situation to him.

"We've got a big lot of redskins in there," remarked Kit.

"What do?" the prisoner asked.

"Take scalps, maybe."

"Indian surrender—no take scalps."

"I don't know about that," replied Kit, shaking his head. "You redskins want to fight all the time. We want peace. The best way to have peace is to kill all the Indians, and then there'll be no further trouble."

"Palefaces bad—no let Injuns 'lone," said the prisoner.

"Oh, it's no use lying about it, redskin," returned Kit. "You won't let a wagon train pass over the plains if you can help it. It's not the palefaces, but bad Indians who bring about all this trouble."

The fellow said no more, but he gazed intently at the entrance to the cave. He could see how the place had been closed. The party were not in range of the vision of those in the cave, or they would have been fired on.

"See here, Ben," said Kit to his comrade, "I think there are nearly a hundred Indians in that cave. They will not keep any bargain they may make with us, because we are not strong enough to force them to keep it. One of us must go to the fort and bring a company of cavalry here to take charge of them as they come out."

"Well, who'll go?" Ben asked.

"We'll draw straws," replied Kit, picking up a small twig which lay at his feet, breaking it in two pieces and covering them in the palm of his hand, held them toward his comrade, "the longest goes."

Ben promptly drew, and the longest one came out.

"All right," he said. "I'll ride like the whirlwind," and started at once for his horse.

Kit was left alone with his Indian prisoner.

"Come, redskin," he said, "we'll go up on the rock and lie down there. It's a safer place than down here."

He made the savage go in front of him all the way up the rocky bluff, keeping his rifle ready to shoot him down on the least attempt to escape.

Once more up above the entrance to the cave he laid down, making the prisoner lie in front of him.

"You may go to sleep now if you like, redskin," he said, "but any tricks will be bad for you. I won't have any nonsense."

"Ugh!"

"Well, all right. Don't try any of your tricks on me. I'm going to hold these fellows inside here till my pard comes back, or kill the whole lot."

"Ugh!"

"I see you understand me. Don't make any mistake about it."

Then commenced the long vigil. He knew that Ben Hornady would have to ride at least one hundred and fifty miles before he could get back. But he knew that he would get back if alive, and bone and muscle could get him back.

The sun rose to high noon, and then began to sink down toward the west. The Indian in front of him lay as still as a log. To his surprise the wily savage had gone fast asleep, and was unconscious of his surroundings.

"This fellow knows I dare not go to sleep before Ben returns, and therefore he takes all the sleep he can get till a chance occurs for him to get away."

Kit Carson really envied the redskin the pleasure he was enjoying. But he did not interrupt his sleep.

"If he thinks he will be awake to catch me napping," he muttered to himself, "he is making a mistake. If I get so sleepy that I can't keep away from the land of dreams, I'll either kill or tie him to a tree, where he'd never be able to get loose."

During the afternoon the Indians in the cave kept pecking away at the log. They could not cut it crossways. They could only strike it as if to split it. Cottonwood is the meanest wood in the world to split.

It was slow work to them, and occasionally they would break out into the most demoniacal yells the great scout had ever heard.

He was lying in a position where he could see whether or not they were making any impression on the log.

"It will take them a long time to cut away that log," he thought.

"I may as well tie up this fellow and get a little sleep to-night. I got none last night. It will be hard work for me to keep awake to-night."

He arose, waked up the redskin, and conducted him to a sapling just over the curve of the back of the bluff. There he tied him where he could sleep without much discomfort, at the same time being unable to free himself.

"I guess that's all right now," he muttered, returning to his place and resuming the watch on the log in the mouth of the cave.

The sun went down and the hammering on the log still went on.

But they seemed no nearer cutting it away than when they first commenced on it.

The stars came out and the sky was serene. Save the noise made by the tomahawks of the caged redskins a most profound silence prevailed.

Hour after hour passed, and Kit Carson, iron-framed as he was, began to feel the want of sleep. He had not slept any the night before.

"If I go to sleep," he thought to himself, "and any more of them come along, that redskin will point out my place to them, and I'd be killed before I could get ready to defend myself. I'll go down and crawl into that hollow log where we found him, and take a nap there. They would not think of finding me in there."

He sprang up and crept down without being seen by the prisoner, and went in search of his horse. He found Rocket quietly grazing near where he had left him, and said to him:

"Stay here, old fellow, till I come back. I'm going to take a nap of sleep."

He left him and made his way to the log. Into it he crawled, and stretched himself out at full length.

"Ah!" he muttered, "I can sleep splendidly in this. Here's a small knot-hole where I can breathe fresh air. Unless some prowling snake comes along and crawls in I'll have pleasant quarters."

Making himself comfortable, he closed his eyes and courted sleep. At first the closeness of his quarters kept him awake for nearly a half hour; but soon after that he grew gradually oblivious to his surroundings, and then he glided into the land of dreams.

CHAPTER IX.

DEFENDING THE CAVE.

How long he slept he knew not.

He was awakened by hearing the Indians in the cave yell like all possessed.

"Great coons!" he muttered, "those devils may be nearly through that log by this time! I wonder how long I have slept?"

He crawled out, and was astonished at finding it nearly good daylight. Glancing uneasily at the entrance to the cave, he was rejoiced to see the cottonwood log still in its place.

"Oh, they are there," he said. "I guess everything is all right. I wonder how that redskin I left up on top of the bluff feels? I'll go up and see how he is. I'm hungry enough to eat anything now."

He crept up to the top of the bluff and looked over toward the sapling where he had tied the prisoner the night before.

He rubbed his eyes and looked again.

The Indian was gone, and the thongs that bound him were gone also.

"Great coons!" he ejaculated in unbounded surprise. "Gone and left his people yelling themselves to death in the cave! That isn't like an Indian. Never heard of one doing such a thing before. Gone! Why, it beats anything I ever heard of. Why didn't he try to get 'em out? Maybe he did, and, finding he could do nothing, went in search of help. He may be lying in wait for me now."

The wily scout placed himself out of range by getting in between the rocks where he could look down and see what progress the savages had made on the log.

He found that they had cut into it some, but that it would yet stand a vast deal of chopping before it would let them have a free passage.

"Hello, redskins!" he called out.

Instantly everyone within was silent.

"Ugh! Paleface there?" an Indian asked.

"Yes—I've been here all night," replied Kit.

"Heap big lie!" exclaimed the savage.

"I guess not, redskin," coolly replied the scout. "I know your game, but it won't work. Why don't you come out and take my scalp? You are a big Indian, ain't you?"

"Ugh!" and the redskin uttered a piercing war-whoop, in which the others joined him.

"Do you know that you will all strave to death in there?"

"Ugh! no—no starve."

"Yes, you will. Your people have been driven back, and nearly all their horses taken."

That fell like a clap of thunder on them. They instantly hushed, and seemed borne down with a heavy woo.

Kit Carson understood at once the whole programme.

The Indian prisoner had either got free himself, or had been cut loose by another, and had been unable to remove the log from out of the entrance of the cave. He had told them that he would go in search of help and then return.

"That's why they are so defiant and hopeful," muttered Kit. "I must be on the lookout now. They may get back here before Ben does, and then there'll be a tough time of it. I wouldn't like to have a score or more of redskins pounce down on me now. It wouldn't be very pleasant."

He was hungry—hungry as a wolf—and there was nothing to eat on hand.

Knowing the redskins could not move the cottonwood log, he shouldered his rifle and went in search of Rocket. That faithful animal was gay and frisky, and glad to see him.

"How are you, old fellow?" he greeted the horse. "How would you like to take a run over to Nick Wadly's place for a breakfast, eh? I know you don't want any breakfast. But a little exercise will do you good. I not only want a breakfast, but I want to leave word with pretty Sarah to send Dick Mason and Tom O'Neill right over here

when they turn up at the cabin again, which they are sure to do to-day or to-night. Keep those boys away from a pretty girl! Come, off with you, old fellow."

He sprang into the saddle and touched the reins. The fiery animal was off like his namesake.

Over the dewy prairie grass he went like a whirlwind, and in less than three-quarters of an hour the seven miles were passed, and the horse and rider stood in the little clearing by the cabin of the old pioneer trapper.

Old Nick welcomed him.

"I am hungry," he said. "I have had nothing to eat since I left here yesterday morning."

"We were just going to eat breakfast," said Mrs. Wadly, "and we have enough to satisfy your appetite. Come in."

"Where's Hornady?" Nick asked.

"Gone to Laramie for troops."

"Thunder!" gasped the old man. "What does that mean?"

"It means that we have caught more redskins than we can handle; so we had to send for help."

"How did you catch them, Mr. Carson?" Sarah Wadly asked.

"We found 'em in a cave yesterday morning, and dropped a big cottonwood log down into the narrow entrance and shut 'em up in a cage."

"Great b'ars!" exclaimed the old trapper. "Why, pard, that's a whole team all at once!"

"Yes. I sent Ben away to Laramie for a cavalry company yesterday morning. He can't get back before to-morrow night, or even the next day, so I am over here to get something to eat and leave word for Dick Mason and Tom O'Neill to run over and see me, if they should come this way to-day."

"They haven't been here since you went away," said Sarah.

"Oh, but they'll come by this way, never fear," said Kit. "Those bright eyes and rosy cheeks will draw a young fellow a long way, girl."

Sarah laughed and blushed by turns, saying:

"They take no thought of me, Mr. Carson. They are too busy looking after their traps."

"Ah! you are a trap, my sweet friend, and both of them are really anxious to be caught. Never fear but they will turn up about here pretty soon. They are brave fellows, and will make good husbands. But don't let them quarrel over you."

"Oh, Mr. Carson!" she exclaimed. "I won't listen to such talk as that!"

"Begorra, I wouldn't, me darlin'!" exclaimed Tom O'Neill, entering the door at that moment, followed by Dick Mason.

"Ah! what did I tell you?" cried Kit, springing to his feet. "I knew they'd be prowling around here again."

"Bedad, but it's meself as thinks ye're something av a prowler yerself, Mr. Carson!" retorted Tom, as he grasped the outstretched hand of the great scout.

"Oh, I'm laying in wait for you two," replied Kit, laughing, taking Mason by the hand also. "In fact, I came here after you."

"The deuce you did!"

"Yes, he did, Mr. Mason," affirmed Sarah. "He didn't come to see me," and she gave a silvery laugh that was music to hear.

"Then it's meself as would be afther coming a thousand moiles to see ye, Miss Sarah, mavourneen," put in Tom, turning and taking both her hands in his.

"I am always glad to see you and Mr. Mason and Mr. Carson," she replied.

"What's the trouble now, Kit?" Dick asked, knowing that the great scout would not have sought him unless help of some kind was needed. He instinctively felt that a fight was near at hand.

"Dick," replied Kit, "I've got a cave full of redskins fastened up out in the timber on Bear Creek. Ben has gone to Laramie for troops, and I have come for you and Tom to help me guard the cave."

Dick grasped Kit's hand and said:

"I'll stand by you till the last trumpet sounds!"

"Come on, then, and——"

"Oh, they haven't had any breakfast yet," said Sarah. "They must have something to eat, you know."

"Well, let 'em be quick about it."

"We brought in a fine deer for the family," said Dick, pointing to a large buck which was lying just outside the door.

The two hunters then ate a hearty breakfast, after which they mounted their horses and dashed away across the open prairie toward the heavy timber on Bear Creek.

It did not take them long to reach the spot where the cave was. They rode hard, for they knew that much depended on the celerity of their movements.

On reaching the place they heard the chopping going steadily on.

"By the great painter!" exclaimed Dick, on seeing the situation, "that's the neatest capture I ever heard of!"

"Yes, and I want to hold them at all hazards," replied Kit. "It will give me more strength with the redskins than anything I've ever done."

They climbed up on the rock above the log and examined the progress made by the tomahawks.

"Whew!" whispered Kit, in great surprise. "They'll get through it at that rate by sunset. Then we'll have the biggest fight we've ever had yet."

"Bedad, but it's an elegant ruction we'll have!" exclaimed Tom. "They'll come one by one, to be killed loike shape."

"It will be better to keep them in there till the troops come," suggested Dick. "There may be too many for us to handle."

"Yes, and I am expecting other Indians every moment who will try to rescue them."

"Then we ought to cut down that tree there and roll part of it down alongside the other," suggested Dick.

"Great coons, Dick!" cried Carson, "that's just the thing! Ride back to Wadly's and get a couple of axes. We'll soon fix that. Don't stop to talk with Sarah, but come back as fast as your horse can carry you!"

Dick ran down into the woods and mounted his faithful animal. In another minute he was off and out of sight.

He had not been gone ten minutes ere the woods rang with demoniacal yells, and then a rush of half a score of redskins followed.

"Here they come!" exclaimed Kit, leveling his rifle and bringing down one. Tom followed his example, and another redskin bit the dust.

They didn't have time to reload their rifles. The savages were too close. They drew their pistols and reduced their number two more, and then came the most desperate hand-to-hand fight ever known in the annals of border warfare.

CHAPTER X.

A DESPERATE FIGHT—THE WOUNDED HEROES.

THE terrible odds against them did not cower the two daring men. They had faced death before, and were not the men to run from danger when they had courted it themselves.

"Whoop!" yelled Tom, as the redskins closed round him with their tomahawks, "ould Ireland foriver! Down with the red nagurs! Whoop! Whack!" and, clubbing his rifle, he swung it round with such terrific force as to send two of the redskins to grass in a jiffy.

Whatever those heavy steel barrels struck had to give way, and woe betide the unlucky head that came in contact with them.

Back to back the two heroes stood, and swinging their rifle barrels about them, kept the redskins off. Round and round them the savages ran, howling and screeching like all possessed. The yells of those in the cave added to the pandemonium of horrors.

Suddenly Kit Carson discovered the Indian who had escaped among the assailants. The wily rascal was too cautious to come within the sweeping range of that rifle barrel. He stood aside and tried to get a shot at the leg of the great scout, an evidence that they had plotted to take him alive.

On seeing him aiming at his knee, Kit Carson sprang forward and brought his rifle barrel down on his unprotected head with a crushing force.

The blow killed him almost instantly, and then Kit started back to rejoin Tom.

With a yell of triumph four stalwart savages sprang upon him. Their united weight and strength were too much for him. They bore him to the earth.

But he went down with his terrible bowie in his right hand. He kept thrusting and plunging and squirming with that weapon. Blood poured all over him. Two dead Indians were actually on top of him, his knife having touched the hearts of both.

Such terrible work as that was more than Indian nature could stand. One only found himself able to stand up when Carson sprang to his feet again.

"Ugh!" grunted the astonished redskin. "Paleface heap big brave!"

"You are right, redskin! There's one for you!" and plunging forward, he buried the bowie to the hilt in the Indian's side, who sank down by the side of his companions, another monument of the terrible valor of the greatest scout and Indian fighter that ever lived.

During the short struggle Tom O'Neill was bravely defending himself against two stalwart redskins, who had succeeded in wounding him in three places.

"Whoop!" yelled the brave fellow, "stand up to it, ye red nagurs! Come in an' give me anither whack at yez! Whoop!"

He laid about him with a terrible energy. But, warned by experience, they kept out of range of the awful sweep of that rifle barrel, and tried hard to bring him down by hurling their tomahawks at him.

But when they saw Kit Carson coming at them with a calm, hard-set expression on his bronzed face, they gave a yell and darted away through the woods at the top of their speed.

"Whoop!" yelled Tom, on finding that he and Kit were the victors over such odds. "Hurrah for Kit Carson! Tom O'Nale foriver! Whoop!"

They were too much exhausted to pursue the two savages. Tom had four wounds and Carson seven. But they were only flesh wounds—none of them dangerous, but they were weak from loss of blood.

"Are you hurt, Tom?" Kit asked, turning and facing the gallant young Irishman.

"Faith, an' it's meself as doesn't know," replied Tom, feeling of himself.

It was soon discovered, however, that he had four severe cuts, from which the blood flowed freely.

"Bedad, it's blading to death I am!" exclaimed Tom, looking very serious.

"I hope not," and the scout proceeded to examine his cuts. Blood was flowing quite freely, but his experienced eye told him that no arteries were cut.

"If you never die till you bleed to death from these cuts," remarked Kit, "you will live to be the oldest man the world ever saw."

"Bedad, it's glad I am to hear that, Mr. Carson!" and Tom grasped his hand and wrung it cordially. "Faith, an' it's yerself as is kilt intoirely dead!"

"I'm pretty well cut up, I guess," returned Kit.

And so he was. He had seven severe flesh wounds that would have laid an ordinary man on his back for a fortnight. But he went to the creek and washed the blood off and proceeded to bandage them as best he could. They aided each other by turns, and thus managed to stop the bleeding to a great extent.

In the meantime, the Indians in the cave began to suspect that their friends had again been defeated, and had settled down into a melancholy despair. They ceased their howling and stopped chopping on the log.

"They've given up the straggle," remarked Kit, after an hour or so, "and won't give us any more trouble. When an Indian gives up, he is completely whipped, and will sit down to die without a murmur."

"Bedad, it's lucky for us that they do," said Tom. "The red hay-thins could cut out av they only knew it, begorra."

"Yes—and maybe they will see that point yet. Hunger may drive them to it."

They climbed up over the entrance to the cave again and sat down, feeling very weak from loss of blood.

"Hello, redskins!" cried Kit, after a pause of several minutes.

"Ugh! Paleface heap big warrior!" came from beside the log.

"Are you hungry?"

"Ugh!"

"Here's several dead redskins up here. If you want them to eat you can have them."

"Ugh! Injun no hungry. What paleface do now?"

"Wait till you all die," replied Kit, winking at Tom.

"Paleface heap big fool," said the Indian.

"How so?"

"Let Injun out, smoke pipe of peace, an' go home."

"Oh, you are willing to go home, are you?"

"Ugh! Injun go home."

"But you would soon put on war-paint again. Your tongue is crooked. We can't believe you."

"Injun no come back."

"Indians are all bad. Antuga told you to let the white man alone, but you would not. I will wait now till the soldiers come. They will take the redmen to the fort and make a treaty with 'em."

The Indians evidently didn't like the idea of falling into the hands of the soldiers. They held a council, and Tom and Kit could hear some one of them making a speech. They could not make out what was said, but they could hear grunts of assent to pretty near everything that was said.

"They are talking about surrender," said Kit.

"Yes; but we don't want 'em to surrender," replied Tom.

"Oh, no, of course not. They would not keep their word five minutes unless there were men enough behind us to make them do so."

"Begorra, it's roight ye are. We'll kape 'em in ther hole till ther sojers come."

After a while Dick Mason returned with old Nick Wadly and two axes, and was thunderstruck at the scene that greeted him.

There were eight dead Indians on the ground, and the two hunters badly wounded.

"Great Jerusalem!" he exclaimed. "You've had a glorious time of it!"

"Yez are roight!" replied Tom. "It was an ilegant ruction. Bedad, I niver was so happy in me loife."

"You are both badly hurt," said Wadly, "and ought to be attended to at once. Can you ride back to my cabin?"

"I think so," replied Kit.

"Do so, and Dick and me will stay here till Ben comes back."

"It's a rale ould gintleman ye are, Mr. Wadly!" exclaimed Tom.

"May the blissing of God follow ye all the days av yer loife!"

The two heroes then made their way to their horses, were helped into the saddles, and rode slowly off.

"The soight av Sarah's swate face will be afther makin' me well entoirely," remarked Tom, as he rode out of the woods and started across the open prairie to the humble home of the pretty prairie flower.

CHAPTER XI.

BADLY WOUNDED—TOM O'NEILL IN A BAD WAY.

KIT CARSON was not the man to abandon a post as long as there was strength enough in him to stand by it. But he had been wounded before, and knew the result of a great loss of blood. He also knew that the Indians would not make another attempt to rescue those in the cave, as the one attempt had been such a fatal failure that no new attempt would be made before the return of Ben Hornady and the troops.

He and Tom O'Neill rode slowly over the prairie toward the home of old Nick Wadly, both growing more weak with every mile they passed.

"By the piper as played afore Moses!" said Tom O'Neill, "I'm so wake that I can't howld meself up."

"Brace up a little longer," said Kit. "Another mile and we'd be there. Sarah Wadly will make your strength come back to you again."

"It's her that has taken the heart clane out o' me, begorra," said Tom.

"Oh, she'll put a new heart and fresh courage into you. Brace up, old fellow. Who ever heard of an Irishman giving away when going to see his sweetheart? Ah! there's the house! I see Sarah now, standing in the door!"

As if the sight of the peerless maiden did put a new heart and courage into him, Tom urged his horse forward and made a dash for the cabin. The horse dashed up to the door and came to a sudden halt.

The next moment Tom fell from the saddle and landed all in a heap.

Sarah was thunderstruck. He was bloody nearly all over, notwithstanding the bandages he and Kit Carson had put on.

She gave a scream and called:

"Mother! Oh, mother!"

Mrs. Wadly ran out just as Kit Carson rode up and leaped to the ground.

"Poor Tom!" he said. "He is only weak from loss of blood."

"Why, you are wounded, too, Mr. Carson!" cried Sarah, as the brave scout stooped and tried to raise Tom to his feet again.

"Yes, we are both hurt," he said. "But they are only flesh wounds. We will soon get over them."

His strength was not equal to the task of lifting Tom up. Mrs. Wadly assisted him, and then they carried him into the house and laid him on a couch at the farther end of the room.

"Where is my husband, Mr. Carson?" Mrs. Wadly asked, a look of alarm in her eyes.

"He is guarding our prisoners, ma'am, and perfectly safe," he repeated.

"If he is safe, how did you get hurt so badly?"

"When Dick was here after the axes we were attacked by a party of ten Indians. We fought and killed all but two. The fight was over before he returned with your husband."

The wife and mother drew a long breath of relief, and then the wounds of the two men excited all her sympathies.

Sarah knelt by Tom's side and felt of his pulse.

"Oh, Mr. Carson!" she cried. "Is he dead?"

"Oh, no. He's only fainted from loss of blood. Pour some cold water on his face, and he'll come to in a few minutes."

She did as he suggested, and in a few minutes Tom groaned and opened his eyes.

"You are better now?" she asked.

He made no reply—was too weak.

By and by he felt stronger and asked for water.

Kit Carson held a drink of brandy to his lips. Tom drank it and felt stronger almost immediately.

"You are all right now. Just keep quiet and try to go to sleep. Let him alone, Sarah. He'll never go to sleep with a pretty girl sitting alongside of him."

Kit's quiet sarcasm always had its effect, and the result was that Tom was in a deep sleep in ten minutes.

"Sleep is a great healer," the great scout remarked. "If you can get your patient to sleep, you have done more than medicine can ever do. I would like a little sleep myself, for I've lost about a half gallon of blood to-day."

His bronzed features looked a little pale, and he reeled toward one of the big rocking chairs near the hearth, into which he sank with a heaviness that seemed unnatural to him.

In a few minutes he was in a deep slumber.

When Dick Mason and old Nick Wadly were left in charge of the prisoners in the cave, they did not understand anything about the chopping that had been going on so long. Dick knew that Kit Carson had fears of the one log being insufficient for the purpose of keeping them in the cave till Ben Hornady returned.

Wadly examined the log from the position above the entrance to the cave, and found that the redskins had cut it nearly in two.

"By the great tornado!" exclaimed the old man. "They have cut the log half in two!"

"They seem to have given up, though," replied Dick, "as I don't hear any more chopping."

"Oh, they'll get at it again when they see how near through they are; we must put another log in there or they'll all get out before morning."

"Well, we had better go to work, then, and cut that tree there."

"There is a log farther up there which will do, if we cut it in two; we'll have to be careful not to let it roll too far or it will get away from us."

The two hunters took their axes and went to work on the log old Wadly had pointed out. Both were good choppers, and in an hour they had the log cut and ready to roll down to the place where they wanted it.

By cutting poles and using them properly as levers, they managed, after another hour's work, to get the log in a position to drop it alongside the other one.

"We won't drop it," said Wadly, after a pause, "unless the redskins commence chopping again."

"Oh, that's a good idea!" exclaimed Dick. "I never thought of that. We can keep guard and watch, and if they commence again we can make sure of keeping them in till Ben gets back. I think Ben will be here to-morrow morning."

"Yes, and then the soldiers won't have so much trouble in getting them out if we keep it up here. Hello, redskins!"

"Ugh!" came from within. "How paleface?"

"Oh, we are all right. How are you in there?"

"Injun all right, too," was the reply.

"Are you hungry?"

"Ugh! no; Injuns eat heap big dinner all time."

"What a set of liars!" Dick remarked.

"That's sarcasm," quietly remarked the old man.

"Won't you come out and smoke with us?" Dick asked.

"No; Injun stay here an' smoke."

"Got any tobacco?"

"Ugh! heap tobacco."

"Oh, what's the use of lying so, redskin? Why not tell the truth?"

"Injun no tell lie; his tongue is straight," was the reply.

"Let him alone, Dick," said the old man; "we can take turns at watching till Ben returns."

Night came on and the stars came out in all their brilliancy. The two hunters kept up a strict watch for any prowling bands of Indians that might be passing that way, and were ready to drop the log at the first alarm of attack.

About midnight they heard a signal out in the woods. It was repeated.

"If that's Ben Hornady, I'll soon find out," whispered the old man, and then he gave another signal.

A response came at once.

"Ah, that's Ben!" he exclaimed, and he gave another signal that brought Ben up on the bluff.

"Hello, Wadly!" exclaimed Ben, on seeing the old man when he expected to meet Carson, "where's Kit Carson?"

"In my cabin, all hashed up by the redskins," was the reply.

"Did you bring the soldiers?" Dick Mason asked.

"Yes; they are in the edge of the timber, waiting for my signal. Are the redskins still in the cave?"

"Every man of them."

"Where's Tom?"

"Down with cuts with Kit," replied Wadly. "I sent 'em both to my shanty to get sleep and their wounds dressed."

"Sorry they are hurt. Will they die?"

"Guess they will, some time," he replied.

"But not from their present wounds?"

"Guess not."

"Glad to hear that," and then Ben turned and gave a whistle that was understood by the officer in command of the cavalry company.

A few minutes later a company of United States cavalry came up and stopped in front of the entrance to the cave. Dick and old man Wadly ran down to meet them and explain to the officers how the savages were caught.

"How many are in there?" the officer asked.

"We don't know. They won't tell us anything about it."

"We'll go into camp and let them out in the morning," remarked the officer. "I don't think it prudent to let them out in the dark. Some of them would get away. This is the most remarkable capture I ever heard of. The government will undoubtedly take notice of it."

"I turn them over to you, captain," said old Nick Wadly. "Kit Carson left them in my charge. He's at my cabin badly hurt. I'll go back there now and tell him you have come. I know he'll feel better when he hears of it."

"I would like to go with you, old man," said Ben, "but I'll have to stay and help the troops get at the redskins. Tell him I'll be with him as soon as we get 'em out."

"All right," replied the old man, as he and Dick returned to their horses.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PRETTY NURSE—AN INDIAN COUNCIL.

WADLY and Dick Mason returned to the cabin of the former, and left Ben Hornady to guide the troops in the matter of securing the Indians in the cave.

They found Kit Carson and Tom O'Neill in a high fever from their wounds. Tom was very bad off, though Carson had three more wounds than he did.

But the news that the military had come, and in time to secure the prize, almost made the great scout feel well again.

"I am glad they got there in time," he said, "for I would hate to have so much time, trouble and blood thrown away. I never fought more desperately in my life to hold anything."

Tom was overjoyed at the news.

"Bedad," he said, "I can get well now as fast as a bird can fly."

"Only you don't want to do it as long as Sarah nurses you, eh?" put in Kit.

"Faith, an' ye're roight, Mr. Carson," he frankly replied, "an' it's meself as thinks yez have that same complaint."

Kit laughed and cast a furtive glance at the blushing maiden.

"She is a tempting nurse, Tom, my boy," he said. "It makes me feel better to look at her."

"Oh, I won't nurse either of you any longer!" she said. "I'll go and talk with Mr. Mason. He won't talk such nonsense as you two do," and with that she turned and left the room.

"Faith, I'm a dead man now," groaned Tom, who was terribly jealous of Dick Mason.

"Oh, you're all right there, Tom," Kit remarked. "You've got the drop on Dick there. Just be easy."

"Be alsy, is it! Bedad, ye niver had a whole hornet's nest in yer heart, did yer?"

"No," said Kit, laughing.

"Thin don't tell me to be aisy. By the piper as played afore Moses, I'm in the devil's stew!"

"Tut, tut, Tom!" and Kit laughed heartily over the gallant young Irishman's nervousness. "Lie still and you'll do more as a very sick man than if you were able to fight a thousand redskins."

Sarah Wadly listened attentively to the reports made by her father and Dick Mason. Tom and Kit remained lying on their backs in the other room.

By and by they all retired, and sleep once more came to all of them.

Just a little after sunrise the troops commenced the removal of the log which had so effectually imprisoned the Indians. It took two hours to get it out of the way.

When it was removed, the gaunt, hungry-looking savages came out one by one, more dead than alive. There were thirty-five of them. A more disgusted body of redskins was never seen in the West.

They were disarmed, and the troops prepared to march them back to Fort Laramie, as prisoners of war.

Ben Hornady left the troops and hastened to Wadly's cabin to see Kit Carson and Tom O'Neill. He rode with hot haste, for he didn't know but that the great scout was dangerously hurt.

He was very much relieved, though, when he found that they were only flesh wounds.

"There were thirty-five redskins in the cave," he reported to Kit, "and they all feel very grateful to you for shutting them up. They want to comb your hair for you, just to show how much they love you."

Kit smiled.

He understood the irony of his chum.

"I guess they will have a little affection for me after this," he remarked.

"Oh, yes. They'll send out war parties in search of you to compel you to come in and be scalped."

Dick and Ben kept the cabin amply supplied with game during the ten days the two wounded men were confined there. Deer, turkey, quail, rabbit, squirrel, and fish were as plentiful as sunshine with them. Sarah and her mother were kept busy curing hams for future use in the event of a siege by the redskins.

But during the ten days they were there they neither saw nor heard of an Indian. They seemed to have come to the conclusion that they had made a mistake in pushing so far down into the timber. The fate of the party of thirty-five warriors had gone out among them, and they had resolved to keep away from there, for the time being, at least.

At the end of ten days both Kit and Tom were able to go about, and did go out with the others in quest of game.

During the time they were there Sarah Wadly studiously avoided giving either Tom O'Neill or Dick Mason a chance to make love to her. She treated both alike, and was as merry as a song bird all day long.

One day, when both hunters were well and strong again, a party of Indians, some thirty or forty strong, were seen riding at full speed across the prairie in the direction of the timber along Bear Creek.

"They are going to look at that cave," said Kit Carson to the others. "They know that Wadly had a hand in guarding the prisoners in there, and will doubtless pay him a visit."

"It looks that way," said Ben Hornady, who looked at things in the same way that Carson did.

"I will go over there and keep an eye on that crowd," continued Kit, "and you three had better remain and protect the family."

"All right, pard," replied Ben. "Don't let 'em get the drop on you."

"Oh, I'll be prudent enough," and mounting his horse, the daring scout rode across toward the Bear Creek timber, striking it some three miles below the point where the savages entered.

Concealing his horse in a very thick clump of bushes, Kit shouldered his rifle and pushed ahead on foot in the direction of the cave.

He came up with the party encamped in front of the cave just as the stars began to peep out.

The redskins had built a large fire, and were engaged in earnest discussion about something.

Concealing himself in the bushes, and creeping as near as the darkness and the protection of the bushes would permit, Kit Carson quietly awaited for developments. He saw several of the redskins approach the mouth of the cave and peer into the intense darkness beyond. They seemed afraid to enter, and came back to the camp-fire to jabber and grunt over what they had seen.

At last it was plain that a council was to be held there, and Kit, who understood their language pretty well, resolved to get nearer to hear, if possible, what was said.

But guards were placed out all around the camp. When a council is to be held the redskins are more particular about guards than at any other time.

As the guards were being stationed Kit saw that one would certainly be placed about where he was concealed.

Almost in front of him, but not quite between him and the council of warriors, stood an immense tree. When the guard came he walked slowly around the tree, glancing in every direction, as if in search of a hidden foe, and then squatted down at the base, on the side toward the light.

The position of the sentinel rendered it impossible for Kit to get any nearer to the council. He could see and hear the voice of the chief, but could not make out what he was saying.

Several speeches were made, and the grunts of the warriors were numerous. Kit could not get the drift of their remarks, but he saw enough to convince him that vengeance for the capture of Little Wolf's party in the cave was the object of the council.

The council lasted till midnight. Just before it broke up Kit stepped on a dry twig, which snapped sharp and distinct.

The sentinel at the base of the tree sprang up and came creeping in his direction, peering eagerly into the bushes. Kit drew his bowie and waited for him. He saw that he would come right upon him, and therefore resolved to kill him before he could give an alarm.

The sentinel at last pushed his head through the very clump of bushes in which the scout was standing. Kit drew the keen edge of his bowie across his neck with such tremendous force as to almost completely sever the head from the shoulders.

The savage dropped without a groan, and in two minutes his spirit was in the Indian's happy hunting grounds.

"That ends him," said Kit to himself. "I can take that tree myself now."

He moved out of the bushes and took his place behind the tree. But he found that he could hear no better than when he was in the bushes.

At last he resolved to give them a scare that would have a good effect on them for months to follow. He took the body of the dead sentinel and dragged it to the base of the tree, placed it in a sitting posture, with its knees drawn up. Then severing the head from the neck, placed it in his hands on his knees.

"I'll get round to the other side now," he said to himself, "and see what effect it will have on them."

It was an easy matter to creep back into the woods and get round on the opposite side of the camp.

A half hour later the council broke up, and the sentinels were called in to receive the decision of the warriors. All came in but the one under the big tree.

A warrior went forward to see what the trouble was. He found the sentinel sitting at the foot of the tree, holding his trunkless head in his hands.

Of course he yelled—any Indian would have yelled—and in a moment every Indian in the camp was yelling.

CHAPTER XIII.

"STRONG KNIFE."

EVERY Indian in the camp yelled and whooped, and rushed forward to the tree to see what he had been yelling about.

The ghastly sight of the dead warrior seated at the foot of the tree holding his severed head in his hands was something they had never been treated to before. They didn't know what to make out of it, and so they yelled like so many wildcats.

Kit Carson hid himself in the bushes and watched their proceedings.

They gathered about their dead comrade and held another excited council. They drew their tomahawks and flourished them above their heads, making the welkin ring with their yells of rage.

The darkness prevented them from following his trail, so he remained in his place and took it all in.

But some strange fatality suddenly drove another warrior right in upon him. The savage was in search of something, and in a careless sort of way ran in upon the scout.

Before he could say "Jack Robinson" the redskin's throat was cut from ear to ear. He dropped down all in a heap, without a groan, and yielded up the ghost because he could not help himself.

"Great coons!" muttered Kit, "here's a chance to give 'em another scare! I'll cut his head off and set him up as I did the other."

As the others were gathered around the first sentinel who had come to such an untimely end, he had little difficulty in arranging the second one to his satisfaction. He cut off the already nearly severed head and placed it in the hands on the knees of the corpse, as in the case of the sentinel.

This done, he glided away to the south side of the camp, and concealed himself where he could still command a view of the scene.

The redskins took the body of the sentinel and laid it out at full length on the ground at the foot of the tree, and then returned to the camp fire.

In less than ten minutes they made the horrible discovery that another one of their number was holding his head in his hands instead of on his shoulders.

Yells and howls filled the air, and the superstitious sons of the forest grew more excited than ever over this mysterious enemy, who was making himself felt in such a peculiar way.

Kit Carson chuckled in his sleeve over the consternation he had created among the red men. He could see that they were growing uneasy.

"If I could get another one in that way," he muttered to himself, "I think they would take up the line of march for some other locality, or maybe they would go into the cave for protection. It's a rough thing on them, but it's not as bad as burning a man at the stake. They would burn me if they could get hold of me."

He waited nearly an hour, in the hope that one of them would come out in his direction. But he soon saw that they were getting cautious about moving out of sight of the others.

The Indians held another council, and it was agreed at once to go over on the other side of the creek and camp there. They accordingly moved in a body, thinking the cave and vicinity particularly unhealthy to red men.

"That won't save you," muttered Kit, as he watched them from his place of concealment on the south side of the camp. "Your safest thing is to wash off that war paint and go home."

On the other side of the creek they built another fire, and held a short council. Kit managed to get near enough this time to catch what was said.

To his surprise it was a party which had come down for the purpose of destroying the home of old Nick Wadly, in the timber over by the river. They had come into the timber near the cave for the purpose of misleading the family. They intended to attack the cabin just before daylight.

"Oho, my fine red bucks!" said Kit to himself, "and so you are bent on more mischief, are you? Well, we'll see if you don't get the worst of it again."

One of the men went down to the creek for water. He passed within ten feet of the spot where the scout was concealed.

Kit at once followed him, overtaking him at the edge of the water, where he drew his bowie across his throat with such force as to cut off all noise, and almost the head too.

Down went the redskin, and Kit Carson stood over the third victim of his peculiar tactics on that night.

To remove the body to the foot of a tree near the spot, put it in position with its severed head in its hands was the work of but a few moments. He then retired to the opposite side of the camp to await developments.

Pretty soon the continued absence of the warrior was noticed by the others. A hurried movement among them took place, and then six warriors drew their tomahawks, and started in a body in search of the missing one.

They found him as they had found the others—sitting at the foot of a tree with his head in his hands.

The woods resounded with their yells of rage. But Kit could also detect a great deal of superstitious fear with their wrath.

"Ugh!" grunted a chief of the party. "Strong Knife! Injun no see him. Great Spirit angry with his red children."

"Ugh! No!" grunted another. "Nick Wadly Strong Knife! Injun go burn cabin an' take maiden away."

That proposition seemed to be more popular with the party than the other did. They began to make preparations to go at once to attack the cabin.

"They will go now," said Kit to himself. "I may as well be off and warn the others."

Turning away, he quickly returned to his horse, sprang into the saddle and said:

"Now, Rocket, do some of your good work again. We must get to Wadly's at least a half hour ahead of the reds. There'll be some more hot work to-night if they come over there."

They emerged from the timber, and then the faithful Rocket shot across the seven miles of open prairie like his namesake. The scout was almost at the cabin ere the redskins left the timber.

Kit dashed up to the cabin, and found Dick Mason and Ben Hornady on guard. The others were asleep.

"Tell them that the redskins are coming," said Kit.

Hornady did so, and they arose and prepared to receive them.

The old hunter was to remain inside with his wife and daughter as before, and the four scouts were to conceal themselves in the woods outside to attack the enemy in the rear when they appeared.

In a half hour the redskins appeared. They were fully impressed with the idea that the family of the old hunter were asleep and unconscious of the danger that menaced them.

After a whispered conversation among themselves, one crept forward to ascertain if the family were all asleep. He passed round the corner of the house, as if with the intention to go completely around.

"Keep quiet till I come back," Kit Carson suddenly whispered to his three companions, and then he darted away in the bushes to a point where he had the cabin between himself and the Indians. From there he crept quickly up to the house, and concealed himself behind the chimney.

Just one minute later, the savage who had been sent forward to see if the family were all asleep came around the corner, peering through the crevices of the cabin, and stopped within two feet of the scout.

Kit Carson put all his mighty strength in one single blow of his bowie-knife, and the red man's head was actually severed from his shoulders.

Not a groan even escaped him.

He dropped all in a heap at the feet of his slayer, without having known what hurt him.

Kit promptly put him in a sitting posture against the chimney, and placed his head in his hands. Then he crept away into the bushes again, and rejoined his comrades.

The Indians waited some ten or fifteen minutes, and then another was sent forward to see what had become of the first one.

"Ah, there goes another!" whispered Kit, and he darted away to dispose of him.

In ten minutes he returned, and another redskin sat at the foot of the chimney holding his head in his hands.

After awhile the impatience of the Indians became manifest to the scouts. They sent five of their number to look after the other two.

They crept around the house, and looked here and there—now more anxious to know what had become of the two warriors than to find out whether the family were asleep.

Suddenly they came upon the headless braves at the foot of the chimney. Instantly they became demoralized, and uttering terrific

yells, expressive of fear, bounded away to the edge of the timber, where the main body of savages awaited.

"Strong Knife! Strong Knife!" they cried, and the next moment the whole party fled through the woods as fast as their heels could carry them.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TERRIBLE FRIGHT OF THE REDSKINS—"KIT CARSON AN' HIS PARD."

"GREAT tornadoes!" exclaimed Ben Hornady, as the terror-stricken redskins dashed through the woods in full retreat, without having fired a shot. "What's the matter with 'em? I never saw 'em behave so before."

"They are scared nearly to death," replied Kit, smiling good-naturedly.

"But what has scared 'em so?" Ben asked.

"I put up a little job on 'em," he said, and then he explained to them how he had played the mysterious Strong Knife on them at the cave.

"Those two fellows," he said, "who went behind the house are holding their heads in their hands. The sight of them did the business better than I expected. I guess Strong Knife has a reputation with them that'll do some good in the future."

"Hanged if that doesn't beat anything I ever heard!" exclaimed Dick Mason.

"Ye've spiled an elegant ruction, Mr. Carson," said Tom O'Neill, in great disgust. "Begorra, it's no more foighting we'll have, bad luck to ye."

"Oh, don't be uneasy about a fight, Tom, my boy," said Kit; "you'll find trouble enough to keep the hair on your head."

"Och, but it's joking ye are, Mr. Carson! The bloody haythins will be running away whin they saw yez a-coming, begorra."

Kit led the way around the house, where the two dead Indians were found sitting and leaning against the chimney.

It was a ghastly sight and well calculated to send terror into the ranks of the enemy, who had so far been unable to find out who their terrible foe was.

"It's a good idea, Kit," said Ben Hornady, when he had looked at the two silent figures a few moments. "They will never forget Strong Knife, and that is a strong point for us."

"What's the matter with the redskins?" demanded old Nick Wadly from within.

"They are going home for good," replied Hornady. "Come out and see what scared 'em away."

The door opened and the old hunter came out. Sarah and her mother came with him. They were true daughters of Eve, and wanted to see what had driven the foe away in such hot haste.

"Betther go back, me darlint," said O'Neill, trying to turn Sarah away from the horrible scene. "Sure, it's a bloody soight which yer swate eyes would say."

"Oh, I'm not afraid to look at blood, Mr. O'Neill," she replied, "particularly if it's Indian blood," and she brushed past and stood by the side of her mother before the two headless figures.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with a shudder; "who did this?"

Dick Mason pointed to Kit Carson as he stood there in his buckskin suit and flowing hair.

"Oh, Mr. Carson, you are a terrible man!" she said. "The Indians will fear you more than any other living man!"

"Just what I want 'em to do," he said. "I mean to teach them that if they continue to war against the whites they may expect extermination for their race in the end."

"That's the idea, pard," Ben Hornady remarked.

"I think your father will get the credit for this night's work, though," added Kit, still speaking to Sarah Wadly, "or some mysterious power working in his defense."

"How so?" the old man asked.

"They came to destroy your cabin, kill you and your wife, and carry off Sarah," Kit replied. "They saw your cabin, but not a living soul. The mysterious deaths will be believed to be the work of your hands, or of some demon in your defense."

"I hope it will serve to keep them away from us, then," said Mrs. Wadly.

"I think it will," Ben Hornady said. "They had a scare to-night they will not soon get over."

"Oh, I hope they won't come back any more!" Sarah Wadly said.

"They are perfectly horrid."

Mrs. Wadly led the way back into the house, and the men proceeded to remove the dead bodies out of the way. Then there was another re-union under the cabin roof, where the mother and daughter had prepared a meal of venison steaks and coffee.

"By the piper as played afore Moses!" exclaimed O'Neill, "it's spoiling all the fun ye are, Mr. Carson, with yer thricks on ther red naygurs. Begorra, yer spoiled an elegant ruction to-night, bad luck to ye!"

"I should think you'd had fighting enough lately, Tom," said Ben Hornady. "The redskins came near getting away with you the other day."

"Och, now, yez don't mane it, Mr. Hornady! Sure, and didn't we bate 'em?"

"Of course, you did, but they came near wiping you out, though," replied Ben.

"Faith, I'm not wiped out yet, an' bad luck to the day when I am! Would yez live widout foighting, when so many redskins are around?"

"Of course, we can't fight them as long as they behave themselves."

"But that's what they won't do; not the loikes of them, begorra."

The meal over with, the four men withdrew from the house to encamp in the woods outside. They preferred to remain outside with their horses, and sleep in the open air, to being cooped up in a small-roomed house.

Early on the morrow they were all entertained at breakfast by the Wadly family, and then the party separated.

Kit Carson and Ben Hornady mounted their horses and rode in a northwesterly direction, and Dick Mason and Tom O'Neill went up the river toward their home in the heavy timber.

Of course, Dick and Tom promised to call again when down in that direction. They both intended to hunt that way soon, and expected to find the game in the house with the family.

Kit Carson and his comrade went northwest to see if any more Indians were coming down on the war-path. They dreaded a general Indian war, and hoped to be able to find old Antuga and persuade him to throw all his influence against such a step.

They traveled all day long, and camped in the edge of a small patch of timber that night. They did not build a fire because they did not wish to attract the attention of any prowling band of Indians that might be in that vicinity.

On the morrow, however, they built a fire and cooked provisions enough to last them two days, after which they resumed their journey.

About noon they came in sight of a train of nine emigrant wagons, which were being attacked by a band of Indians.

"There they are, at it again!" cried Ben Hornady, as they took in the situation at a glance.

"Yes, and we'll take a hand in it, pard," was the quiet response of the great scout, turning his horse's head in that direction.

The wagon train was some three or four miles distant, so our heroes rode leisurely along over the prairie till they were within a mile of the redskins. Then the savages discovered them and charged upon them a dozen strong.

"Wait till they get right up to us, pard," said Kit, "and then we'll rifle two, pistol two, and then break through for the wagons."

"All right—lead the way. Tom O'Neill would give anything to be with us now."

"Yes, and I really wish he was here," replied Kit. "He would enjoy this run we are about to take."

The dozen redmen dashed up to within a few yards of the two scouts and halted. The peaceful attitude of Kit and Ben, who sat quietly on their horses and waited for them to come up, disarmed the savages, who half suspected they were friends.

"Ugh!" grunted the leader. "Who palefaces?"

"We are two hunters," replied Kit, very coolly. "Who are you?"

"Ugh! Me big chief. Paleface go with Indians."

"Indian must not bother us, or they may get hurt," was the warning Kit gave. "Does not the chief know that the Great Father at Washington will send his army to sweep the red man from the face of the earth if he interferes with the white man?"

"Ugh! Indian take all white man's scalps. White man no come here. This Injun country," and the rascal began to get impudent and demonstrative.

"Does the chief want to fight?" Kit asked.

"Ugh! Yes—me fight."

Crack! crack! went Kit's and Ben's rifles, and two of the red rascals reeled off their ponies to the ground.

Crack! crack! went their pistols, and two more bit the dust. Then putting spurs to their horses, they dashed through the astounded redskins and put for the wagons at full speed.

Such howls as went up from those duped rascals. They wheeled and fired at the two brave scouts, but their bullets went wide of the mark, and in a couple of minutes more the brave scouts were with the emigrants.

The guide of the train ran forward to meet them.

"Great snakes!" he yelled, on seeing them. "We are all right now, boys! It's Kit Carson an' his pard! Hip—hip! Hooray—hooray!"

CHAPTER XV.

DEFENDING A WAGON-TRAIN.

Kit turned and looked at the guide a moment, and then grasped his hand.

"Prairie Bill!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," replied the guide.

"How did you get in this fix?"

"They come down on us," said Prairie Bill, "an' been folloing all day. We've lost four men an' two women already."

"Were the women killed?"

"No; they caught 'em in the hindmost wagon, an' got away before we could catch 'em."

"Where are they now?"

"The women?"

"Yes."

"Oh, they sent 'em away with a dozen warriors in that direction," pointing in a northwesterly direction.

"The scoundrels!" hissed the scout. "We'll make 'em sorry they ever interfered with a wagon-train yet. How many men have you got in the train?"

"We've got eleven men left now."

"That's enough. Have they all got arms?"

"Yes—good rifles."

"Pistols?"

"Yes."

"Oh, we can thrash those red devils then as easily as playing old sledge," said Kit.

The men and women crowded around him, and eagerly questioned him about the chances of beating off the two score redskins that were trying to capture the train.

"You must get on towards water, Prairie Bill," said Kit.

"Yes—yes, but we don't want to get in the timber."

"Of course not."

"Now men," said the guide, "we'll do just as Kit Carson says. What he don't know about Injuns ain't worth knowing."

The Indians were holding a sort of council on their ponies, and were gathered around their chief, who was detailing some plan of attack to them.

Kit gazed at them in silence a moment, and turning to the eleven men, asked:

"Will you follow me?"

"Yes," came from every man in the party.

"Then listen. Those redskins are planning some way to get the best of us. There is nothing like audacity in dealing with them. We'll deliberately march out towards them. They'll think we're coming to sue for quarter, as they wouldn't believe for a moment that we would march out to attack four times our number. When within good rifle shot I will give the signal, when each must take deliberate aim and bring down his man. That will scatter the others in an instant. We must then reload and march back to the wagons."

"But if they charge us before we can reload?" one of the emigrants asked.

"Draw your pistols and wait till they are on us. Then we can bring down thirteen more. That would reduce them more than one-half at two shots. Just keep cool and wait till you are sure of your aim, and you'll clean out that crowd by the third volley."

They got ready to start.

"No man must fire till I give the order, and then each must take good aim, and fetch his man. Now, come on."

The thirteen men marched boldly toward the party of savages, who were holding a council on horseback, just out of range of the rifles of the emigrants.

The Indians were astonished at seeing them approach, and the council instantly broke up. They turned and faced the little party of whites, as if uncertain of their object.

When within good, safe rifle shot, Kit Carson said, in a low tone of voice:

"Let every man make sure of his aim—now! Ready—aim—fire!"

Thirteen rifles belched forth thirteen leaden messengers of death, and eleven Indians were hit. Two had aimed at the same man.

Seven of the eleven savages hit fell dead from their saddles. The other five were so badly wounded that their howls greatly demoralized the others.

The sudden volley threw them into a panic.

They howled like so many wild demons, and scattered in every direction.

"Reload as quick as you can," cried Kit Carson, "and follow me."

In two minutes they were reloaded.

"Back to the train!" and the daring scouts led the way back.

The Indians, on seeing them march back to the train, gathered courage to make an attack.

They charged toward them at a break-neck speed, throwing themselves on the sides of their horses and endeavoring to fire from under their necks.

Kit, Ben and Prairie Bill were old plainsmen, and understood that dodge. They took particular aim, and, though but a small portion of the redskins' heads were exposed, they managed to bring them down.

They reached the train again without the loss of a man, and the emigrants were overjoyed at their success. The women crowded around and thanked him with tears in their eyes.

"We can't play that dodge on 'em again to-day," remarked Ben Hornady. "They'd be on the lookout next time."

"Be sure of your aim every time you fire," said Kit, "and don't fire till you are sure of your game. By that means you'll make 'em glad enough to let you alone."

The Indians again met and talked, and then broke up and commenced making the circuit of the trains, riding around at full speed, lying on the farther side of their horses, and firing under their ponies' necks.

"If you can't get the Indian, shoot the pony!" cried Kit.

Thus the fight went on all the afternoon, the wagons making but little progress toward the setting sun.

The sun went down, and they were still several miles away from water. The redskins were howling around them as if confident of capturing them as soon as it was dark enough to conceal their movements from view.

The women, of whom there were several, were panic-stricken. They believed that it was to be their last night on earth, and so talked to their children until the poor things were crying and taking on as much grief as they could carry.

Kit went among the women and said, in his plain, modest way:

"Ladies, you are giving yourselves a great deal of unnecessary trouble. I tell you plainly that we can take off this train and beat off those rascals. Dry up your tears and encourage your husbands

and brothers with your smiles. I've been fighting Indians a long time, and know just what we can do with these fellows."

His talk and confident manner reassured the ladies, and they at once quieted the children and looked more hopeful themselves.

"Prairie Bill," said Kit, as the stars began to come out, "we must not allow them to come up on us in the dark. Every man in the party must stand guard and be ready for a fight."

"Yes, and every man will fight like a hero, too," replied the guide.

"Look here, Kit," said Ben Hornady; "why not mount our horses and charge on the redskins? We can bring down a dozen and get back without the loss of a man."

"Good. Let's do it, Ben," and the two scouts clasped hands.

Prairie Bill submitted the proposition to the others. They accepted it at once, and in five minutes thirteen men were in the saddle.

"Now," come on!" said Kit. "Let every man make sure work of at least one redskin, and then there'll be but a score of them left!"

He started in a fierce gallop, and the others thundered after him.

The redskins saw them coming, and gathered for the shock. They evidently expected a hand-to-hand fight, for they drew their tomahawks and waited for the onset.

But Kit and his men fired as they went, and in a moment the red rascals were overthrown. The dead and wounded tumbled off their horses, and the others were dazed by the terrible havoc of the volley.

Before they could recover from the shock the whites were in on them with their pistols, and another volley from the small arms did as much execution as the rifles had done. Over twenty of the rascals were thus disposed of in two or three minutes.

The terrified wretches fled with howls of dismay.

"Don't follow 'em!" shouted Kit Carson. "The train is unprotected. Come back at once."

He led the way back in triumph, and the others followed.

Only one of the whites was hurt. He had received a slight flesh wound from a tomahawk which had been thrown.

"Great snakes!" exclaimed Prairie Bill, in high glee, "we laid out over twenty of the red cusses that time. Guess they've got enough of it."

The women were overjoyed at the turn in affairs, and a more smiling set was never seen.

"Oh, you can rest easy to-night," said Kit, "and dream all the nice things in or out of Heaven."

"Oh, thanks—thanks!" cried one of the ladies. "Another day and night like that of to-day would make me turn gray in a week."

"I am sure they will go away now," put in Ben Hornady. "They have lost over two-thirds of their number, and that is more than any band of Indians can stand."

Ben was right. The demoralized savages concluded that such destructive warfare was not what they wanted, and accordingly went away. The last charge was too much for them.

The night passed in perfect quiet, and early the next morning the train moved forward to reach water, which was only a few miles further on.

"Prairie Bill," said Kit, "I'm going to follow the trail of those redskins, and see if I can't find that young girl they carried off."

"God bless you, Kit," said Bill. "I'd give my right arm if I could go, but I can't leave the train."

"Of course you can't. What's her name?"

"Maggie Tracy," was the reply. "Her mother is sick in the rear wagon, on account of her grief."

"Well, tell her I'll bring her back if any man can do it. You'd better stop three or four days at the creek over there and wait for us," and shaking hands with the guide, the famous scout and Ben Hornady turned away and left the train.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE TRAIL.

ON leaving the wagon-train the two scouts went in search of the trail of the Indians who had attacked them the day before. They soon found it, and then pushed rapidly in pursuit.

The trail of a number of horses through an open prairie is an easy thing to follow. It could be seen for two miles, hence our heroes could ride at a rapid speed, and be in no danger of losing it.

They rode for twenty miles, and saw that it led toward a stretch of timber that marked a watercourse southward.

"They must be in there, Ben," said Kit, to his companion.

"Yes, I think there's an Indian village in there. I see several thick columns of smoke above it."

Kit gave a scrutinizing glance at the thin, vapory clouds above the timber, and shook his head.

"I think that is mist, Ben," he said, "not smoke."

Ben looked again.

"I guess it's smoke," he remarked. "I've been fooled by mist as well as smoke several times, and have learned to be more suspicious. I find it to be smoke much oftener than mist, hence I'm betting on smoke this time."

Kit Carson laughed.

"If it's smoke there's a village then," he said; "and if it's a village, the young girl is there."

"And if she's there we'll get her out of their clutches, or somebody'll be hurt," added Ben.

"Right again, pard."

At the edge of the timber they saw that the village was still three

or four miles inward. The trail led straight into the timber, which seemed to stretch away for miles.

"We must hide our horses and make way on foot," suggested Kit. "We can't creep through the bushes on horseback."

"You're right, pard," and both dismounted and led their horses into a dense thicket, where they left them.

Then, taking up the trail again, they followed it toward the village, which stood over on the other side of a creek, just under a bold bluff. It comprised about fifty lodges, and seemed to be the home of peace and contentment in its forest surroundings.

Just at the lower end of the village was a large spring of clear cold water. Several children and young Indian maidens were at the spring, laughing and chattering like so many magpies.

On a log a little distance from the spring sat a couple—a young, brave and pretty maiden. He was making love to her—bragging of his exploits and the number of scalps he had taken. She seemed pleased at his wooing, and the lover grew eloquent in his protestations.

"It's the same thing all the world over," whispered Ben Hornady to Kit.

"Yes, though the wooing differs with different races," replied Kit, in a whisper.

"They are happy, though, as the happiest of any other people. We'll have to wait till night to pursue our search in the village."

"Yes. The warriors are up there at the council-house. They are sore over their defeat last night."

"That's the reason no more are in sight."

"Yes."

The sun was sinking down behind a bank of heavy, black clouds, and in another hour it was quite dark. The black cloud rose up higher and shut out the light of the stars, and low mutterings of thunder in the distance told of a coming rain storm.

"I'm glad of this rain coming," said Kit, "as it will make the warriors keep in their lodges and give us a chance to spy around every lodge in search of the young girl."

They waited until the rain began to fall, and then crossed silently over the creek, passed the spring, and crept up the street of the village.

The first lodge they came to was one belonging to an old warrior, who was curled up on a miserable blanket in a corner, whilst his old squaw sat by a fire cooking a piece of dried buffalo meat.

Several others were visited and found to be the repetition of the first. At the upper end of the row of lodges, however, they found a double one.

In that they saw, through a small crevice, several women and a young white girl sitting around a fire.

The girl was in tears, and was as pale as a sheet. She was apparently about nineteen years of age. Near her, reclining on a bearskin and two buffalo robes, lay the chief of the village. He was talking to her in broken English.

"White Fawn must dry her tears," he said. "No cry when Red Wolf's squaw. Red Wolf make her heap much happy. Give her beads, and she'll make his fire and cook his food. Ugh! White Fawn heap love Red Wolf. Red Wolf great warrior."

She made no reply, as she appeared to be utterly overwhelmed by her woe, despairing of ever seeing her friends again.

"White Fawn heap big fool," said one of the dusky women. "Red Wolf great chief. He make her heap happy. Great fool!"

"Red Wolf has taken me away from my people," replied the poor girl, "and I hate him!"

"Ugh! Red Wolf make her love him!" grunted the chief.

She would not speak with him. She had evidently had a quarrel with him, and would speak only to the women. But the women, though wives of the old rascal, were afraid of him, and tried to gain favor with him by trying to persuade her to look more favorably upon his suit.

Kit and Ben looked on this scene for some little time, and then went back into the woods.

"Ben," whispered Kit, "we will have to do some fine work to get her away. There are not less than fifty braves in the village to-night."

"Yes. If we can get her away without a fight it's our game."

"That's so. We must watch our chance. She won't sleep any to-night, and that fact will help us some."

"Yes. We'll wait and see how long they will sit up."

"I would like to cut Red Wolf's head off and set him up against a tree for them to find him in the morning."

"Great b'ars, pard!" said Ben, "that would make 'em shake for a week."

"Just what I'd like to see 'em do," replied Kit. "Let's see if we can't work it."

The rain poured down in torrents, but the two scouts stood under a large tree and patiently waited for the redskins to go to sleep in their lodges.

At last Kit thought it was time for all to be asleep. He crept forward and peered into the lodge or wigwam again.

All were lying down and apparently fast asleep except Maggie Tracy, the young white girl.

She was sitting by the fire looking as woe-begone as was possible for one to be.

Taking out his keen edged bowie the scout cut the rent in the skin that constituted the wigwam large enough to run his hand through.

A slight noise caused her to look up.

She saw the hand and recognized it as that of a white man.

The hand beckoned to her.

Hope instantly sprang up in her heart.

She glanced quickly and uneasily around at the sleeping chief, and rose to her feet.

The hand beckoned again.

She could not resist, and the next moment she stepped forward, opened the lap of the door, and passed out.

Kit grasped her firmly by the arm, and whispered:

"I am Kit Carson. I have come to take you back to your friends."

She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

The smack awoke the chief in the wigwam.

He rose up and glared around the wigwam. The maiden was gone.

"Ugh!" he grunted, as he sprang to his feet.

"Keep quiet!" whispered Kit to the girl, "and don't utter a word."

Just then Red Wolf stepped outside in the rain and tried to penetrate the intense darkness beyond.

The faint light from within the wigwam enabled Kit to make sure of his work. The heavy bowie descended on the neck of the chief with such force as to almost decapitate him.

He dropped in a heap at the very door of his wigwam.

A low signal from Kit brought Ben to his side.

"Take charge of her," he whispered, "while I set him up against that tree there."

Ben took the girl's hand in his, and held it till Kit had placed Red Wolf in position, with his severed head in his hands, and then they started away together.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RESCUE AND ESCAPE.

At the foot of the hill they found the creek swollen to a torrent from the heavy rain that had fallen. It was as dark as Egypt. They could not see their hands before their faces; but they could hear the angry torrent rushing by like a liquid serpent, threatening instant destruction to any who might attempt to cross over it.

"What shall we do?" Ben asked.

"We must cross at all hazards," replied Kit. "It won't do to remain on this side after the rain ceases. If we can go now we will leave no trail behind us, as the rain will beat it out."

"I am not afraid to go in," said Maggie, who had now regained her courage. "if you are not."

"That's a brave girl! We'll see you through, Maggie, even if we die for it."

"Oh, you know my name?"

"Yes; we have been with the wagon-train, and helped your friends beat off the redskins."

"I am so glad!"

"Well, we'll try to wade across here," said Kit. "Ben, you are taller than I am; go ahead, and I'll follow with Maggie on my shoulder."

"Oh, I'll wade in with you. I'm not afraid."

"But you are too short, little girl. The water would come up to your head. Just let me manage it," and before she could say another word he took her and seated her on his right shoulder. She seemed to be no more than an infant for him to handle.

Ben Hornady started forward into the raging torrent, and Kit followed with the young girl on his shoulder.

The water came up to Kit's breast, and Maggie's feet got wet, but that was all. They passed safely over and reached hard ground on the other side.

"I am not sure that we can find our way to our horses," said Kit, as he placed Maggie on her feet again. "It's so dark that one can't tell exactly which way he's going."

"I think we won't miss it far if we just push right straight ahead from the creek," said Ben.

"No; and we can call our horses to us from the edge of the timber."

"That's it, come ahead. I can push right straight through," and Ben led off.

Kit followed, holding Maggie by the hand. She walked steadily along with him, and didn't mind the steady downpour of rain in the least.

Three hours they struggled along through the timber, and at last came to the open prairie. It was still terribly dark, and the rain came down in torrents.

"I don't know just where we are," Kit said, "but if we can get our horses we will be all right."

He gave a shrill whistle for his horse.

"If he's in a half mile of us he'll come," he said.

A couple of minutes later he gave another whistle, to guide the horses in their search.

A half dozen times did he signal, and then Ben declared he heard the horses snort.

Another signal, and they heard them coming at full speed up in the open prairie alongside the timber.

"Ah! my faithful Rocket!" exclaimed Kit, patting his horse on the neck. "I knew you would come. You are my trusty friend always."

"Oh, how I could love a horse like that!" exclaimed Maggie.

"I am very fond of my good horse," said Kit. "Is yours all right, Ben?"

"Yes—right side up with care," replied Ben.

"Mount, then, and we'll be off. We must get away from this timber before the redskins discover Maggie's escape."

Ben sprang into the saddle and Kit did likewise.

"Now, Maggie, give me your hand," said Kit to the young girl, "and spring up behind me."

She reached up, took his hand, and made a spring upwards. He caught her and placed her behind him, where she clasped an arm around his waist and held on.

"Are you comfortable now?" he asked.

"Oh, yes."

"Well, hold on then," and off they went, taking a direction, as near as they could guess, that would take them to the timber where Prairie Bill and the wagon-train in his charge was encamped.

Day began to dawn in an hour from the time they started, and then they changed their course a little.

"Oh, we are all right now," said Kit. "You will be with your mother and friends before sunset, Maggie."

"Oh, how can I ever thank you for what you have done for me?" she replied.

"You paid me enough last night when you woke up Red Wolf with that smack you gave me," said he, laughing.

She laughed too, and said:

"It was bad for him to wake up."

"Yes, that kiss was his death warrant."

"I didn't mean it for the death warrant of anyone," she said, "but I shall be grateful to you and your friend all my life. I haven't seen your face yet."

"Neither have I seen yours," and he turned in the saddle and gazed back at the sweet, young face behind him. "I did get a glimpse of your face in the dim light of the wigwam, but I would not have known you by daylight."

She had regained her color, now that she was safe. The exercise of riding had sent the glow of health to her cheeks.

"Ah, you are as pretty as a rose!" he said. "I don't blame old Red Wolf for running off with you. You'd make a sweet squaw."

"Oh, now, I'll get down and walk if that's the way you are going to talk," and she drew her face back where he could not see it.

"Come over here on my horse," said Ben, laughing. "He's a gay deceiver."

All three laughed good-naturedly, and the horses were spurred up a little faster.

Mile after mile was passed, and then the clouds began to break. The rain ceased and the sun came out in a flood of warm sunshine.

"Oh, how glad I am to see that!" cried Maggie.

"See what?"

"The warm sunshine," she replied. "I am chilled through and through and as wet as I can be."

"Yes; the sunshine will soon dry you."

"I don't mind being wet, if I can only get warm."

The sun shone warm and bright, and in a short while the young girl was warm and comfortable.

The day passed, and just as the sun was declining low in the west, they came in sight of the timber where Kit had told Prairie Bill to wait for him.

"There they are!" cried Ben Hornady. "I see the tops of the wagons and the smoke of the camp-fires!"

"Oh, I am so glad! God bless both of you!" cried Maggie, bursting into tears.

"God bless you, too, my brave girl," said Kit, gravely.

An hour later they reached the camp. Oh, what a reception they met with!

"Oh, my child! my child!" cried the overjoyed mother, as Maggie Tracy rushed into her mother's arms. "I never expected to see you again!"

"Neither did I expect to see you again, mother," she replied, "but brave Mr. Carson and Mr. Hornady followed me to the Indian village, killed the chief, and took me away. Oh, how can I ever thank them enough!"

Mrs. Tracy ran up to Kit Carson, seized his hand, and covered it with kisses and tears.

"The blessings of a happy mother will follow you all the days of your life, sir," she cried. "You and your friend saved all of us from the savages."

"I am glad, madam, that I have been of some service to you," said Kit. "My friend did as much as I did."

"I thank him none the less," said the mother.

"Oh, I did not give you a kiss, Mr. Hornady!" cried Maggie, running up to Ben and putting up her pouting lips to him to kiss.

Ben dived down at her lips like a duck picking up corn, and everybody in the camp heard the smack.

"Ah!" exclaimed Ben, smacking his lips, "that pays for all. I'd like to spend my days taking such rewards as that."

Maggie and all the others laughed, and then they were invited to breakfast.

"Yes," said Kit, "I am as hungry as a wolf. I can eat more than any two men who have no appetite."

"Come on, then," cried Prairie Bill. "We've got plenty of venison and bearsteaks, bread and coffee."

The three were very, very hungry, and were placed where they could get all they wanted of the good things.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH KIT GETS IN SOME FINE WORK.

THE two scouts spent the day in camp with the emigrants. Maggie went to her mother's wagon and put on dry clothing, and then came back looking as radiant as a pretty maiden only can look. She was really a handsome girl, with laughing blue eyes, pearly teeth and rosy cheeks.

"Tom O'Neill would fall desperately in love with her were he here," remarked Ben to Kit as she came back after the change of clothing.

"Of course he would. I'm half in love with her myself. I'm glad there are not more like her on the plains. They take all the daring out of a man and keep him tied to their apron strings."

"Yes, that's so. I don't think we could do much scouting if we were married, Kit."

"No—not much."

Maggie was a good talker.

She told all her adventures from the time she left the train till she was returned, and everyone hung on her words to the last sentence.

The day passed without any Indians being seen by anyone in camp. The redskins had sought shelter from the storm the night before, and were evidently waiting for the sun to dry the grass a bit.

The reader will, of course, imagine the surprise of the Indians when they awoke the next morning to find Red Wolf dead and holding his head in his hands, and the young white maiden gone, leaving no trail behind her.

Their amazement was unbounded.

Who could have cut off the head of so great a warrior as Red Wolf?

Surely, the young pale-faced maiden did not do it!

Who, then, could have done it?

The Indians had their mysteries as well as civilized people, and the death of Red Wolf was to be one of them in Indian tradition as long as legends were handed down from sire to son.

They sent out their runners in every direction in search of the maiden, but of course, they found no traces of her. The great down-pour of rain had obliterated the trail. She was then miles away out on the open prairie on the horse bestrode by Kit Carson.

As they could not solve the mystery they gave it up, and spent the day among the lodges talking and thinking.

Not being pursued, the scouts spent the day and evening with the train, and on the following morning rode away in the direction they were going when they first discovered the train and its assailants.

Prairie Bill said he would rest there three days longer in order to let the stock recruit their strength before resuming their journey. The emigrants were not opposed to the rest, as game was plentiful there.

The women, too, were satisfied, as there was some washing of clothes to be attended to. Water was plentiful and so it was voted a good place to stop at.

Kit and Ben pursued their way, and in two hours more were out of sight of the camp.

When some twenty miles away from the camp, they were sighted by a large war party several miles away, who instantly commenced pursuit.

"There's at least a hundred warriors in that crowd, Ben," remarked Kit, as he gazed at them coming toward them.

"Yes; I guess so," was the reply.

"Well, as we don't want to lose our hair I guess we'd better make for that timber over there."

"Just what I think."

"Come on, then," and Rocket led off toward a strip of timber some three or four miles away on their left.

They made good time, and entered the timber when the redskins were still some two miles away out on the prairie.

"We'll have to keep moving till night comes on, to hide our trail," said Kit.

"Yes; this way," and Ben led off through the bushes.

Night came on, and the redskins were near enough for the scouts to hear their yells, which resounded through the woods with an ominous import.

As soon as they were sure it was too dark for the Indians to follow their trail, Kit and Ben concealed their horses in the thicket, and returned some distance to find that they had gone into camp near the stream that ran through the timber.

They were a large party and were in full war paint, evidently bent on making a sweep somewhere below, or else hoped to intercept some wagon-trains, and thus get plunder in that way.

"We'll see what we can find out about their movements, Ben," said Kit.

"Yes—get up as close as you can."

"If you get a chance set one of 'em up against a tree with his head in his hand. I think that will have a depressing effect on them."

"I'll get on the west side over there, and you come over on the north side."

They accordingly moved to their positions and waited for the chances they wanted.

Not ten minutes elapsed ere both of them had placed warriors against trees, with decapitated heads in their hands.

The warriors had run in on them, and were cut down ere they could give an alarm even.

Then the two scouts shifted around to the other side and waited for another chance to set up two more of them.

Luckily for them they were soon afforded the chance they wanted, and then there were silent sentinels on the four sides of the camp.

Then they moved back far enough to avoid discovery, and yet near enough to witness everything that might occur in the camp.

Pretty soon a warrior went out to look after his horse, and ran across one of the headless braves, holding his head in his hands.

Of course he yelled.

An Indian yelled at everything, and the others yelled back, and then went to see what it was all about.

Then they yelled all the more when they found the headless warrior at the foot of the tree.

They had not yet heard of the mysterious "Strong Knife," and wondered greatly at the mystery of the thing.

How was it he didn't yell and give the alarm?

After a while another was discovered, and then a third one—all on opposite sides of the camp.

The excitement increased, and when the fourth one was found the feeling was almost panicky.

They had heard no noise, and yet four of their warriors had been killed right under their noses almost.

"They are stirred up now," whispered Ben to Kit, in the bushes.

"Yes—and scared, too."

So they were. They at once put out guards to protect the others, and in less than two hours the guards were holding their heads the same way.

The warriors around the camp-fires were smoking and telling of great deeds by flood and field, when they were startled by a noise among their ponies.

Four or five warriors at once went among the restless ponies and tried to find out what the trouble was.

They soon ran across one of the dead guards.

Then Bedlam broke loose.

Every warrior yelled at the top of his voice, and drew his tomahawk.

The other guards were all found in the same helpless condition, and the balance uttered yells of both rage and fear.

Suddenly, as if in fear of a special danger on the south side, the whole body gave frantic cries and rushed pell-mell into the bushes where the two scouts were hiding.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SCOUTS PICK UP A FIGHT, IN WHICH ONE GOES DOWN AND THE OTHER OUT.

THE sudden rush of the Indians was entirely unexpected by the two scouts. They never dreamed of their work producing anything like a panic among the dusky warriors.

"Here they come!" exclaimed Ben Hornady.

"Give 'em a shot, and break for the horses!" said Carson, and the next moment the two rifle shots rang out on the night air.

Two Indians went down with death yells on their lips, and then the others rushed over them.

The shots did not stop the stampede of savages. Ere the two scouts could get out of the way they were in the very midst of a score of red men.

But in the darkness the color of their skins or the style of their dress could not be seen. Both quickly extricated themselves from their unpleasant association, and made their way to their horses, where they remained ready to mount and flee whenever necessity prompted.

There were too many red men in that party for them to fight against. They were not fools, and didn't intend to fight and die for the sake of keeping up their reputation for courage.

Luckily for them, the Indian stampede was not in the direction of the spot where the two horses were hidden, or else they would have been in a bad way. The horses would have been captured, of course, and that would have been the utter ruin of the scouts, almost.

But they ran in a body in another direction, and did not stop until they had gone at least a mile from their original camp.

They kept in a body and when they halted, at once prepared to establish another camp. A large fire was soon going, and the doughty warriors jabbered away over the peculiar panic that had suddenly seized upon them.

"It beats anything I ever saw, pard," said Ben Hornady, when the redskins had gone out of hearing of the two scouts.

"Yes; it's a big joke on them, isn't it?"

"Yes. They don't know just what it is yet."

"I hope they won't, either," replied Kit. "Maybe it will break up this war-path business."

"That will never break up as long as there are two Indian bucks alive," remarked Ben.

"Guess you are right, pard. If the sight of four headless redskins has such an effect on them, I think we had better follow them and give them another dose."

"Good! I'm with you, pard!"

"Come ahead. I don't think they have gone far," and Kit led the way, with his horse following close at his heels.

They soon caught a glimpse of the new camp-fire. It was in a more eligible place than the other was, and our heroes lost no time in getting into a good place for observation.

The red men held a council and several speeches were made. But the mystery of "Strong Knife" remained unsolved.

The hour grew late.

The council broke up, and the warriors prepared to roll in their blankets around the camp-fire.

One of their number went into the bushes near where Kit Carson was, and in a moment the terrible bowie-knife had done its work.

In order to stir up another panic, Kit took the severed head and hurled it into the midst of the warriors as they stood around the fire.

Such a howl as went up from them was seldom heard in any part of the world. They were in a rage, as well as trembling with fear.

"Ugh!" grunted the head chief of the party. "'Strong Knife' is here. Injun stay together. I have spoken."

The others grunted assent, and drew their blankets about them and

squatted down around the fire, like men who had resigned themselves to a fate they could not avoid.

Every mother's son of them covered his head with his blanket, and remained as motionless as a stump under it.

The two scouts gazed at the silent figures around the camp-fire and wondered what had come over the fiery redmen of the West that they should refuse thus to fight.

"They think the Great Spirit is angry with them, I guess," whispered Kit Carson to his companion.

"I hope they will continue to think that way," Ben said, "and preach that kind of gospel to all the tribes."

"So do I."

"But what shall we do now? They don't seem to have any more spirit left in them."

"Oh, they'll have spirit, enough to-morrow if they see an unprotected emigrant train out on the prairie," Kit replied, "and the thought of that makes me feel inclined to kill the whole band if I can," and the daring scout glared fiercely at the crouching figures around the fire.

"I guess we had better not do anything," he continued, "that will make them think it is our work instead of the Great Spirit's. In that case they would be more vindictive than ever."

"Let's look after their horses then," suggested Ben.

"What can we do with so many?"

"Carry them into Laramie."

Kit remained silent for several minutes. He was thinking. It would be a terrible loss to the redskins to lose so many horses.

"We'll try it, pard," said Kit. "Laramie is only about fifty miles from here, I think."

"About that," assented Ben.

"Come away, then, and let's look after the stock." And Kit led the way back to where the Indians' horses were left. The ponies were in a large thicket, and there were five redskins there in charge of them.

The scouts were under the impression that all the redskins were with the main body. Kit therefore, walked right up to one ere he suspected his presence.

"Ugh!" grunted the dusky sentinel. "paleface die!" and he aimed a terrific blow at the scout's head with his tomahawk.

Kit barely had time to spring aside and thus save himself. The miss came near throwing the savage off his balance. As it was he staggered forward, and before he recovered himself Ben had buried his bowie to the hilt in his breast.

A death yell burst from the doomed savage's lips, and the other four answered instantly.

They rushed forward and attacked the two scouts with such impetuosity that they were thrown on the defensive in a very few moments.

In the dark it was difficult to see the dusky fellows, and so the two scouts were disposed to be cautious in their movements.

But they had little time to plan or think. Just as they were going to fall back in order to be sure of having the enemy before them, a tomahawk struck Ben Hornady on the head from behind with such force that he dropped to the earth like a log.

"S'death!" hissed Kit, on seeing Ben's face, "I'll send you with him, you miserable spawn of the earth!" and he laid about him with a ferocity that caused the enemy to give way for a few moments.

But unfortunately for our hero, at that moment a dozen other savages, hearing unmistakable sounds of conflict, seized their weapons, and hastened to the defense of their ponies.

They came with defiant yells, showing that, notwithstanding their recent experience, they were still full of fight and as dangerous as ever.

Desperate as was the case, Kit was compelled to fall back.

Several attempted to cut him down from behind, but he was too active for that. He sprang to the right and left so rapidly that the redskins frequently struck each other when they aimed at him.

At last he was forced to dodge in the bushes to escape being killed, as they surrounded him and were cutting at him from all sides.

A yell of triumph went up from the redskins, though five of their number were slain, and then they gathered around the prostrate form of Ben Hornady.

CHAPTER XX.

A NIGHT OF TERROR.

On finding himself alone in the bushes, the redskins not daring to pursue in the intense darkness of the night, Kit Carson stopped and listened to the talk indulged in by them over the body of Ben Hornady.

"Poor Ben!" muttered Kit; "he was as brave a man as ever drew breath. It is a pity he should fall by the hand of a redskin. I s'pose they'll scalp him. But I'll hang round this band till I get the scalp from the one who carries it, and his own besides, or my name is not Kit Carson. Ben, my friend, your death shall cost these red fiends more than any other man who has died by their hands."

The savages kept yelling and going on over their victory, as they regarded the retreat of Kit and the fall of Ben Hornady, and seemed to regain all the confidence in themselves which they had lost two hours before.

They went back to the camp-fire, dragging the body of Ben Hornady after them, and made the welkin ring with their shouts.

The blow which laid Ben out was not a fatal one.

The edge of the tomahawk had glanced so hard against his head as to cut an ugly scalp wound, and stun him into insensibility.

Dragging him to the camp-fire, some two hundred feet from where he fell, completely restored him to consciousness.

He opened his eyes and glared around at the jubilant redskins, and instinctively divined the situation.

He raised his hand to his head to ascertain the nature of his wound. That movement was the first intimation the Indians had that he was not dead.

The discovery filled them with a frantic delight.

They danced around him and yelled and whooped like so many lunatics.

"Ugh! paleface not dead! Injun heap glad!" cried the chief, bending over him and looking into his blood-stained face.

"Well, I'm glad myself, redskin," said Ben. "I'd rather be alive than dead any time. Where's the other white man?"

"Ugh! Him dead—got scalp," replied the chief.

"Where is his scalp?"

The Indian made no reply.

Ben knew then that Kit had escaped. He also knew that unless the world came to an end, or death overtook him, Kit Carson would hang around and do all in his power to aid him in his trouble.

On that his faith was so strong that he was prepared to defy and laugh at the redskins, even though he was wounded and in their power.

Regaining his strength, he rose to a sitting position, and glanced around at the red demons, who were gazing at him with a degree of satisfaction he had never seen them manifest before.

"You redskins haven't killed me yet," he remarked, looking as though he was not afraid of them killing him either.

"No kill," said the chief. "Paleface burn, cry like papoose."

"Chief, you are a fool. You never heard a paleface cry in your life. Indians cry. They cover their heads with blankets when they see an Indian's head cut off."

"Ugh! Paleface cut off Injuns' heads?"

"No; Great Spirit cut 'em off," he replied, thinking to keep up the delusion in their minds.

"Heap big lie!" returned the chief.

"Heap big coward you are!" replied Ben.

The chief slapped his face with his open hand.

In an instant Ben sprang to his feet and gave the chief a blow with his fist that sent him heels over head backwards into the fire.

Being unarmed, he attempted to dart away into the thicket and escape through the intense darkness. But they were too many for him.

They piled on top of him and bore him to the earth, nearly crushing him by their united weight.

The result was he was bound hands and feet ere he was let loose from the pressure.

The chief was rescued from the fire by several of his braves.

He was perfectly furious with rage. His eye was all bunged up from the blow of Ben's fist.

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed Ben, as he caught a glimpse of the bunged optic of the chief. "You went into the fire first, chief."

"Ugh! Paleface go in next," was the reply.

"Oh, you didn't stay in long enough," said Ben. "You ought to roast awhile. How did you like it?"

The chief was so much enraged that he came near braining the scout with his tomahawk. He raised it above his head and was about to bring it down upon Ben's head when another chief seized his arm and said:

"Ugh! no kill. Burn at stake."

"Burn—yes, me burn him!" replied the chief. "Ugh! me burn him. Paleface cry like papoose."

"Oh, you're an old papoose yourself. Two white men can whip the whole band. Untie one hand for me and I'll lick any two redskins in this crowd."

"Ugh! Paleface want to run away. No let him loose. Paleface run like coyote."

"I never run from coyotes," said Ben.

They took him up and placed him against a tree, where they tied him securely with deerskin thongs.

Then they made merry, laughing, joking and tantalizing him, to all of which he replied in a manner to convince them that he was in no wise intimidated by their threats to burn him.

He fully believed that Kit Carson was around somewhere, watching over his safety. He knew that Kit was not the man to desert him in such a situation as he was in.

Midnight came, and the redskins made preparations to go to sleep around the camp-fire.

Suddenly a terrific yell was heard from an Indian, who had gone out on the left in the edge of the bushes.

The others sprang up and ran to the spot, to see what the trouble was.

There sat a warrior against a tree, holding his severed head in his hands between his knees!

The whole band howled in unison, and Ben chuckled with delight.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed. "Go over on that side and you'll find another. The Great Spirit fights for the palefaces. 'Strong Knife' is here and the redmen are doomed."

"Ugh! Paleface heap talk," said the chief.

"The Indians heap howl, too," he replied. "They are scared now. They tremble like squaws. Go out there," nodding in another direction, "and you'll find another brave playing with his head."

Some of the warriors went out in that direction, and, sure enough,

there was another dead and headless redskin sitting up against a sapling.

Fierce yells rent the air again, above which was heard the loud mocking laugh of Ben Hornady.

Ben suspected that Kit had been silently at work, and wanted to keep up the excitement as much as possible.

"Go that way and you'll find another!" he sung out, and the chief and a dozen warriors rushed forward to see if he told the truth.

To their horror they found another.

The terror of the savages now increased to the highest pitch.

Ben raised his voice above the din of their yells, and cried:

"Let the redskins listen to the voice of warning. The Great Spirit owns all the world. All the people in the world are His children—the white as well as the redmen—and He wants them to live like brothers. He is angry with His red children. They will lose their heads if they do not go back and live in peace with their white brothers. Go over that way—" nodding towards the south side of the camp—"and you will find another brave holding his head for you to look at. I have spoken."

The terrified, superstitious savages rushed in a body to the south side of the camp to see if his words were true.

Ben didn't really know whether Kit had been to work on that side of the camp or not, but hoped that he had, so his words would be verified.

To his great relief the yells of the redskins attested the truth of his words.

They had found two instead of one, sitting side by side, holding their heads in their hands.

In the intense excitement of the moment every savage had rushed forward in a body, leaving the prisoner alone at the tree.

In a flash Ben felt the cords that bound him to the tree give way. They fell at his feet.

"Come away, pard!" he heard Kit Carson whisper, and picking up his rifle and bowie-knife he darted away out of sight in the bushes.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE OLD MEXICAN AND HIS FAMILY.

THE two scouts grasped hands as soon as they were well in the bushes, and Ben said:

"I knew you would hang on, pard, just as I would have done. I owe you one. Notch it on your gun, and I'll pay it some day."

"That's all right," said Kit, returning the pressure of his grasp. "We'll hang on to this band a while longer, if you are not too much hurt."

"I've got a pretty ugly scratch," remarked Ben, who was now beginning to feel weak from the loss of blood.

"Just listen to their howls."

The dumfounded savages turned away from the two headless braves, and rushed back to the fire.

Their terror increased every moment.

But when they looked toward the tree where they had left the prisoner only two or three minutes before, and saw that he was gone, a sudden panic seized them.

They were about to scatter and fly for their lives, when the voice of the chief called them to order.

"We will return to our village," he said, "and remain at peace with the palefaces. The Great Spirit is angry with his red children. I have spoken."

"Let 'em go," said Kit. "They will remember this beheading business as long as they live."

They watched the redskins make rapid progress in getting away from that fatal spot. The ponies were led to the edge of the timber, and there the redskins mounted and rode away over the prairie.

"Gone," said Kit; "but they will come again. They will soon think the Great Spirit is in a good humor again, and go on the war-path in another direction. Peace is not relished by the red man."

"No. He is a lover of bloodshed," added Ben.

"How does your head feel?"

"Bad enough," was the reply.

"Do you think you could hold out to travel seven or eight miles?"

"Yes—where would you go?"

"To old Vega's cabin."

"The old Mexican! Can you trust him, pard?"

"Oh, yes. I saved him and his family from destruction once, and they pledged their souls to me."

"I will go wherever you go."

"Come on, then. Old Vega is as good as a surgeon in dressing a wound, and his wife and daughters are splendid nurses."

They made their way to their horses, led them out on the edge of the prairie, mounted and rode away, skirting the timber in a northerly direction.

Ben was quite weak, but Kit rode rapidly, and, in less than one hour, they halted on the edge of a very heavy timbered forest.

"Dismount," said Kit, "and let your horse follow you."

Ben did as he was told, and quietly followed Kit into the woods, which, such was the dense foliage of the trees, was as dark as pitch.

"Just follow me," said Kit, "and you'll be all right."

"I am doing that as blindly as a blind man can," said Ben. "I can't see anything at all."

After a few minutes, Kit stopped and gave a peculiar signal—one Ben had never heard him use before.

They waited near five minutes, and then Kit repeated it.

A minute later a response was heard, and pretty soon another nearer than the first was heard.

"It's all right," said Kit. "Come on," and he started forward again.

Ben pressed close at his heels, and the two horses came after.

Suddenly a light flashed on them, and an old Mexican was seen holding a torch above his head.

"How are you, Vega?" Kit greeted him, as he approached him.

The old Mexican's face lighted up as he recognized the scout, and he reached out his hand to him.

"I am glad to see you, Carson," Vega said, in good English.

"Thanks. My pard is hurt; wounded by the redskins. We have come to your house for rest and food, Vega."

"You shall have both with a good welcome," replied the old Mexican. "Come in," and he turned and led the way into a small log-cabin that was built against a bold bluff of rock and earth.

Kit and Ben followed, and in another moment they were inside a comfortable hut, where a fire smoldered on the wide hearth.

The old man threw a piece of pine on the coals, and in a few moments there was a bright blaze.

Ben was a bloody sight to look at. He had had no chance to wash the blood from his head, face or hands, and therefore looked like one who had literally been butchered.

"Caramba!" exclaimed the old Mexican, on glancing at the blood-stained scout. "You are badly hurt!"

"Yes," replied Ben, dropping into a rude arm-chair in front of the hearth. "I am very weak, too," and he looked as if he was about to go under.

The old Mexican ran into another room, which was really a cave under the bluff, and soon returned with a bottle of brandy.

"Here, take some of this," he said, "and you'll feel stronger."

Ben took a strong pull at the bottle and passed it to Kit, who also took a pull.

"Yes, that'll make you feel better, pard," Kit said, as he handed the bottle back to the old Mexican.

"I feel better already."

"Take a nap and you'll feel better still."

"When I have washed the blood off I will."

Old Vega brought water, and Ben went to work and cleaned himself up, after which the Mexican dressed his wound as well as any surgeon could have done.

He then went to sleep in the chair, whilst Kit sat in another before the fire and slept till morning.

Carson was awakened by feeling a warm kiss on his cheek.

Opening his eyes he saw a pretty Mexican girl standing at his side.

"Ah!" he said, "how is Senorita Isabel this morning?"

"I am well, senor," she replied, in a silvery voice. "Is the senor much hurt?"

"Only a flesh wound, I think," replied Kit. "I think he would feel entirely cured if you were to awaken him with a kiss."

"Oh, Senor Carson, I cannot do that! He is *estrangero*!"

Kit laughed, and chuckled her under the chin. A moment later her mother and another daughter entered.

"Ah, senora!" he said, rising and taking the mother's hand. "I am glad to see you. How is Senorita Maria?"

"Well, Senor Carson," replied the young girl, going over by the side of Isabel and staring at the face of sleeping Ben Hornady.

So much talking around him soon woke up Ben, and Kit then made him acquainted with the mother and daughters.

The women went about getting breakfast, and in a very short time the meal was ready.

Ben and Kit were both hungry, and soon made an impression to that effect.

But the supply of good things seemed inexhaustible, and they were urged to eat all their appetites called for, and they did.

After breakfast Kit went out and took the saddles off the horses. He knew he would have to wait several days for Ben's wound to heal up sufficiently for him to travel again.

A fever came on, and Ben was very ill. Kit remained by his side, as did the two daughters of the old Mexican, who proved to be faithful nurses.

One day Kit was sitting by the bedside of his comrade, when old Vega came in and said:

"There are Indians down by the creek, and they have a young lady prisoner. She cries all the time, and asks why Senor Carson does not come to her assistance."

"Great Coons!" exclaimed Kit; "who can it be?"

"Go and see, Kit," said Ben. "I would go too, but—"

"Senor Hornady can't go," said Isabel Vega, quite firmly.

"Of course not," replied Kit; "I will go myself. I never leave a woman in distress," and taking his rifle and small weapons, he left the cabin of the old Mexican, and made his way through the heavy timber toward the creek a half mile away.

In a short while he found a party of about a score of Indians, camping on the banks of the stream, eating a noon-day meal. On a log by the fire he saw a young woman sitting, the picture of the deepest woe.

"My God!" gasped Kit, on seeing her face. "It's Sarah Wadly! I wonder if the old folks have been killed!"

Such a flood of speculation as passed through his mind!

He knew the brave old hunter would never yield except with his life, and so he was sure he had fallen a victim to the tomahawks of the vindictive savages.

"I'll stand by you, Sarah, or perish," he muttered, and then began to calculate how long he would have to wait for darkness to aid him in his work of rescuing her from the wretches.

As the sun was still some three hours high, he knew he had to wait at least four hours, and so he spent the time looking for articles of plunder from the Wadly cabin.

Suddenly a smile of satisfaction came over his face.

"The old folks are safe," he muttered to himself. "They have nothing from their cabin except Sarah. They picked her up out-doors somewhere and ran off with her. I feel better now, and will be easy till I know the rest from her lips."

Night came on.

The savages had concluded that, as they were at least fifty miles from where they captured her, they would rest there till the next morning.

That was just what Kit wanted. He only wanted the shadow of night to protect him from being pursued by the redskins and run down.

As soon as it was dark he crept up nearer to the camp-fire and waited for a chance to begin work.

It would not do to attack the whole band single-handed and alone. He knew that such foolhardiness could have but one result—defeat.

But he did not have to wait long ere the very Indian who had been by the fair prisoner's side all the afternoon came into the clump of bushes where the scout was concealed.

Instantly the terrible bowie-knife was at his throat.

Just as he was about to yell and alarm the camp, the savage chief felt the knife sever his jugular and wind-pipe, and down he went, all in a heap, without a groan.

CHAPTER XXII.

SARAH WADLY AGAIN.

THE chief was dead in less than three minutes, and then the daring scout looked around for the best place in which to place the body.

By the aid of the light from the camp-fire he saw a large cotton-wood tree nearby, to which he dragged the body and set it up against it, cutting off the head and placing it in the nerveless hands on the knees.

Then he glided around to the opposite side of the camp, so as to be behind and nearer to Sarah when the excitement should spring up on the discovery of the dead chief.

He waited nearly an hour, at which time one of the Indians went in search of the chief. His continued absence caused remarks to be made by the warriors to the effect that something might be wrong.

The fire had just been mended up, and by the aid of the increased light the brave found the chief in the position the scout had placed him in.

He had heard of Strong Knife, and how he served his victims, and leaned forward with a wildly throbbing heart to see if this was some of his work.

The next moment he let out a terrific yell that caused every savage in the camp to bound to his feet and chorus the music. So sudden was it that even Sarah sprang up in alarm.

Every savage rushed into the bushes to the assistance of the brave who had yelled, and Sarah was left alone.

Quick as a flash Kit Carson dashed up behind her, seized her in his arms, and darted back into the bushes with her.

"I am Carson. Make no noise," he said, as she struggled to free herself from his grasp.

"Oh, I'm so glad! I thought you were an Indian!" and she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him repeatedly.

"Put me down," she said, after a few minutes. "I am too heavy for you to carry, and I can walk along by your side."

"Tell me," he said, as he stood her on her feet, "are your parents hurt?"

"I think not. The Indians caught me down on the creek some three or four hundred yards from the house, and ran away with me."

"I am so glad to hear that!"

"How did you find me, Mr. Carson?"

"An old Mexican, to whose cabin we are now going, came in this afternoon and said the Indians were down at the creek with a woman prisoner. I've been watching you about five hours."

"Oh, I was thinking of you all the time. I knew you could rescue me if you could only find me. Where is Mr. Hornady?"

"In the Mexican's hut getting over a wound like that of Tom O'Neill's."

"Ah! is he hurt?"

"Yes, but not dangerously. He will be up again in a few days."

By this time the savages had discovered the escape of the fair Sarah, and were making the welkin ring with their yells of rage and defiance.

They ran all around the camp, but dared not go into the bushes except in a body, lest they meet Strong Knife and lose their heads.

In the darkness they could not follow the trail, so they were forced to submit to the loss until the return of daylight would give them a chance to follow up the fugitives.

Kit Carson led Sarah through the woods till he found the hut again by means of signals, which the old Mexican promptly answered.

"Ah, Vega, I have brought another one to share your hospitality," said the scout. "She is the daughter of my old friend, Nick Wadly. Take care of her and you will do the best thing you ever did in your life!"

"Yes, senor, she is welcome," replied Vega, opening the door of his hut and telling her to enter.

Sarah entered the hut, and Kit followed.

The old Mexican remained outside to listen to the whoops and yells of the Indians, which still resounded through the woods.

"Oh, Mr. Hornady!" exclaimed Sarah, running forward to the bedside of the wounded scout; "I'm so sorry to see you wounded!"

"Why, Sarah Wadly!" cried Ben, perfectly amazed at her presence there; "what in the world are you doing here?"

"Oh, the Indians were taking me away when brave Mr. Carson rescued me," she replied.

"Your parents?"

"Are unharmed, so far as I know," she answered.

"I am glad to hear that!" and the wounded man turned to Isabel and Maria Vega and introduced them to Sarah.

They both kissed her and gave her a hearty welcome.

"Oh, I'm so glad to meet some of my own sex and age," said Sarah, gazing at the two girls.

"So are we," they both replied.

"And I am glad for all of you," said Ben. "I shall have nurses enough now, I'm sure."

"Too many nurses sometimes kill a patient," said Kit, shaking his head. "I'm afraid you will never want to get away from your nurses, pard."

"Oh, I'll get up in a few days," said Ben.

"And then be taken down again with heart disease."

"Maybe so—maybe so," said Ben, looking at the dark and pretty Isabel in a manner that sent the warm blood of her race rushing to her cheeks.

Sarah noticed both the scout and the fair nurse, and with a woman's intuitive knowledge, saw that if he had not already lost his heart, she had lost hers.

But she said nothing. She saw that Isabel was pretty, and seemed to be a girl of good sense, as well as of an amiable disposition.

The presence of Sarah Wadly seemed to revive Ben Hornady to such an extent that he sat up and talked as lively as ever with his three fair nurses.

"Pard," said Kit, after awhile, "I must go out and see if I can't send those redskins away so they will not find Sarah's trail to this cabin in the morning."

"Strong Knife can send 'em away with little trouble," remarked Ben.

Sarah looked at Kit and turned quite pale. She knew who Strong Knife was, and what that terrible name implied.

She knew that it meant the beheading of several red men, and the thought made her shudder with horror—not that she cared anything about the death of any of them, but that the brave scout should risk his life in her behalf.

"Oh, Mr. Carson," she whispered in his ear, "don't risk yourself to-night! Let's go away, and—"

"That would leave the others to bear the brunt of the fight, my dear child," he replied. "I can run them off without any trouble."

"If they once get you in their power they will burn you at the stake."

"I know they would, and for that reason I am not going to let them get me."

"Won't you let me go with you?" she asked.

"Great coons, no!" he replied.

He walked out of the little hut, wending his way through the woods toward the camp of the savages, who were still making the woods ring with their war-whoops.

He reached the camp, and slipped around in the bushes, hoping to get a chance to surprise an unsuspecting redskin and make a guide post of him.

But experience, or something else, made them keep together around the fire. They quieted down, and held a sort of council over the death of their chief.

Many of them laid down in their blankets and went to sleep, whilst others sat up around the fire as guards.

"They won't give me a chance at them," muttered Kit to himself, as he noticed how they were preparing to spend the night. "I must try to get them up and out into the thicket."

He took up a rock and hurled it into the midst of the redskins, striking one stalwart brave between the shoulders with such force as to send him to grass.

Of course there was a yell of rage, and a dozen warriors dashed into the bushes in search of him. They surely thought that an enemy who only threw stones could not be a very dangerous one.

Kit had to make haste to shift his position to avoid being run over by the redskins. He moved away to the right so as to be out of their way, yet to be near enough to cut down any straggler who might come in his way.

He was standing in the bushes like a statue, waiting and watching, when he felt himself suddenly attacked from behind.

Turning, he found himself face to face with an immense black bear.

To draw and fire would be to expose his position to the redskins.

To use his bowie-knife would be exceedingly dangerous, as the bear was as well armed and had the decided advantage in the dark.

He gave a sudden yell, and then dodged away in the bushes.

Instantly a dozen redskins were on the spot, and a hand-to-hand fight with the bear commenced.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE YOUNG HUNTERS AGAIN.

BEFORE the Indians were aware of it they were engaged in a close fight with the bear.

The darkness was in the bear's favor, and though the redskins whooped and struck wildly with their tomahawks, the bear knocked them right and left, and did considerable damage.

At last he was so enraged by a blow from a tomahawk that he seized a redskin in his powerful arms, gave a fierce growl, and crushed him to death.

"Ugh! A bear—a bear!" cried the others, and then the entire party rushed to the assistance of their comrade.

But they were too late to save him! He was already crushed. The bear, seeing so many crowding around him, tried to escape and get away from them.

They were too many for him, however, and he was finally killed.

Then they again whooped and shouted over their victory as though a terrible enemy had been vanquished.

In the excitement of the fight with the bear the Indians forgot all about the mysterious enemy who had thrown the rock, and many of them wandered carelessly into the bushes in the vicinity never to return again.

Kit Carson met them with his terrible bowie and settled them forever.

They drew the dead bear to the fire, and proceeded to skin him and cook some bear steaks—a luxury of which they were very fond.

By and by one of the others discovered that one of the braves was sitting against a tree on the south side of the camp, holding his severed head between his knees.

A wild yell called all the others to the spot, and then a series of wild, frantic whoops rent the air.

"Strong Knife!" cried one of the party.

"Ugh! Strong Knife here!" cried another, and then a mortal terror began to come over them.

An Indian has a great horror of losing any member of their body, as they believe the mutilation will continue in the Happy Hunting Grounds of their peculiar theological belief. They had heard of this terrible work of the mysterious Strong Knife, and had a horror of meeting him.

Suddenly the discovery of another decapitated brave was made, and their yells were no longer defiant. They indicated great fear, and the trembling warriors began to keep together in a body as the only means of protection in their power.

At the finding of the third one they all proceeded silently to their horses, and in ten minutes more were on their way toward the open prairie on the left.

"Ah," said Kit, "it has done the work for them. They are going away. They won't follow my trail to the cabin of old Vega."

He waited till the last Indian was gone, and then he turned and made his way back to the cabin of the old Mexican.

"They are gone," he said, as he entered the hut, and we will not be troubled with them in the morning."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" exclaimed all the three girls at once.

"Sorry I wasn't with you, pard," said Ben Hornady. "I know you had some fun with 'em."

Kit Carson smiled and said nothing. He was not a man to talk much of his own exploits. But Ben well knew the nature of the work he had been engaged in, and deeply regretted the wound that prevented him from taking part in it.

The women prepared a supper that was a luxury to all in the hut, and it was not till a late hour that they retired to sleep.

Early on the morrow Kit Carson was up and making preparations to conduct Sarah back to her home. She had agreed to ride Ben's horse, and Kit was to bring him back to Vega's hut, where Ben was to wait for him.

But just before they were to start something led Kit to visit the camp of the night before, where the Indians had had such a terrible experience with Strong Knife.

He wanted to see if in their flight they had not left some weapons of some kind.

The Indians who were so unfortunate as to lose their heads had been pretty well torn to pieces and devoured by panthers and wolves.

Kit was about to turn away when he was startled by an exclamation of:

"By the piper as played before Moses, it's Kit Carson himself! Whoop!" and the next moment impetuous Tom O'Neill burst through the bushes, followed by Dick Mason, and grasped him by the hand.

"Great coons, Tom!" cried Kit. "You here? And you, too, Dick?"

"Yes," said Dick. "We are following the trail of a party of Indians who have run off with Sarah Wadly."

"Yes, the bloody haythins took her away, and begorra, we'll follow 'em to the end of the wurrold!"

"I've been on their trail myself," said Kit; "but Ben got hurt so badly I had to stop and see him through."

"The divill!" cried Tom. "How did he get hurted?"

"The same as you did—by a blow from a tomahawk."

"Where is he now?" Dick Mason asked.

"In a hut back there a little ways. Come and see him. Maybe he is well enough for me to leave him and go on the trail with you."

"Bedad, but we'll bate the red naygurs av ye do!"

"Oh, we can catch them, I am sure," said Kit. "How did you leave the old man and the good mother?"

"They are afther being in a hape of throuble," replied O'Neill; "the mother is breakin' her heart wid grafe."

"Oh, well, she'll soon have Sarah back again. They can't keep her with you two after her."

"It's mesilf as will niver shtop till I git her," said Tom, in a deep, earnest tone of voice as they turned and followed the king of scouts up to the hut of the old Mexican.

Just as they passed through a clump of bushes Isabel, Sarah and Maria came out of the hut and stood in the warm sunshine to breathe the fresh morning air.

Tom saw and recognized her at a glance, but his astonishment was so great that he was utterly speechless for the moment.

Dick Mason stood like one rooted to the spot, his gaze fixed on the face of the maiden they had been in search of.

"Oh, Mr. O'Neill!" cried Sarah, bounding forward like a young fairy, "I'm so glad to see you."

"Be me sowl!" he exclaimed, rushing forward and clasping her in his arms, "it's mesilf as is half dead wid joy at seeing yer! Did yer git away from the red naygurs?"

"Oh, Mr. Carson rescued me last night," she replied. "Oh, Mr. Mason, I'm glad you have come! I am sure of being safe now!" and she disengaged herself from Tom and ran forward to greet Dick.

"Howly Moses, how did it happen, Mr. Carson?" Tom asked.

"Oh, I gave them a little business to attend to," replied Kit, "and then snatched her up and ran off with her. This is Miss Isabel Vega, Mr. O'Neill, and this is her sister Maria, two of the sweetest girls and the best nurses in all the West."

Tom bowed almost to the ground, and the two sisters blushed at the hearty praise of the great scout.

Sarah then introduced Dick Mason, and told the two sisters that Tom and Dick had been on the trail of her captors, and were following it when Mr. Carson met them.

Old Vega came out and invited them into the hut to have something to eat, which invitation they promptly accepted, as they were very hungry.

Another meal was soon prepared, and then Tom and Dick sat down and ate to their fill.

"We were just on the point of going back to Wadly's," said Kit, "when we met. Sarah is going to ride Ben's horse and I am going to bring it back. I think you two had better stay here and take care of Ben and the family till I return."

Tom and Dick both looked blank at the suggestion.

"The redskins may return and attack the cabin," Kit added, "and in that case your rifles would be needed. Ben is not yet in a condition to fight."

"Beggorra, av they would come an' give us a foight," Tom remarked, "I would be afther waiting a wake."

"They may come any day, Tom, and give you all the fighting you want. I must carry Sarah home and then send word to Laramie of these war parties."

"Bedad, I'll go to Laramie wid yer report," volunteered Tom.

"Will you? I was afraid it would be asking too much of you."

"Av coorse, I will, an' all the red naygurs can't stop me."

"I will write a note, then," said Kit, and producing writing materials, he wrote a letter to the officer commanding at Fort Laramie, giving in detail the movements of the Indians in that section of the country for the past fortnight.

"Now, give that to the commander of the post there," said Kit, as he handed it to the gallant young Irishman, "and I'll speak a good word to Sarah for you on our way back home."

"Bedad!" exclaimed Tom, as the others burst out laughing at his expense, "it's that same wurred I'd spake for mesilf, Mr. Carson. Faith, an' av she'd listen to ye she'd think it was the blarney stone ye were."

They roared at his retort, and shaking hands with all, kissing Sarah's nut-brown fingers, Tom mounted and rode away like a whirlwind.

"The woman he marries," said Sarah, turning to Isabel Vega, "will get a brave man for a husband."

"You are right, Sarah," Kit said, "and his heart is as big as his body."

"Oh, he's as good-hearted as any man can be," Sarah said, laughing. "But isn't it time for us to be off? It's a long ride back home, you know."

"Yes, I am ready if you are."

"I am ready," and going to Ben Hornady's bedside, she shook hands with him and Dick Mason.

Then she turned and clasped Isabel in her arms.

"I have learned to love you as a sister," she said, "and you must come and see me some time, will you not?"

"Yes," replied Isabel, "for I like you ever so much."

"I am so glad to hear you say that," and then Sarah took the younger sister in her arms, and hugged her affectionately.

"Dear Maria," she said, and then she turned and left the hut.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BRAVE MAIDEN.

KIT CARSON assisted Sarah into the saddle, and made her comfortable. It was a man's saddle, but she knew how to use it, and felt no inconvenience on that score.

Kit sprang upon Rocket's back, and then the two made their way toward the edge of the timber, so as to get out on the open prairie, where they could make good time.

When they reached the prairie they went off at a swinging gait.

Sarah was a capital rider, and enjoyed it like a young child eating candy.

"Oh, this is just splendid!" she exclaimed. "I wish I was a man! I would live on the prairie and have the fastest horse in the world!"

"You would soon wish yourself a woman again," said Kit, laughing good-naturedly.

"I don't think I would! Do you ever wish you were a woman, Mr. Carson?"

"No," he replied, thoughtfully.

"I thought so. You would rather be a man. I would, I know!"

They rode steadily for many miles without seeing any living thing except plenty of game, which they did not molest, as they wanted to reach the Wadly homestead that night.

In the afternoon, however, they came in sight of three Indian warriors, who had evidently been separated from their band during a chase.

"Oh, what shall we do, Mr. Carson?" Sarah cried, in great alarm.

"Keep right on our way," replied Kit. "What else can we do?"

"But they are coming after us! They will kill you and take me away again!"

"I don't think three Indians can do all that," said he smiling.

"Can you fight three Indians by yourself?" she asked.

"I think we can manage them together."

"Oh, I've got a dagger and a pistol!" she said. "Must I shoot one of them?"

"Yes, if he interferes with you. I don't think they will attempt to bother us, though."

By this time the three braves had come within hailing distance of them.

"How?" one of them called out.

"How are you?" Kit returned.

"Stop—want to talk with white man."

Kit stopped, and Sarah was at his side in a minute.

"What do you want?" Kit asked, as they came up.

"Who you?"

"I am Kit Carson. Who are you?" the scout answered.

Now, every Indian in the West had heard of Kit Carson, and knew him as the most terrible foe they had to deal with.

"Ugh!" grunted one, thunderstruck on hearing the name; "paleface great brave!"

"What does the redman want of me?" Kit asked again, seeing that his name had staggered them.

"Want to smoke pipe of peace with white man."

"There is no need of that," said Kit. "I never fight unless I'm attacked. Go your way and I'll go mine."

"White man no friend," one of the redmen said.

"Your tongue is crooked. I am not a baby. The redman cannot fool me. I have spoken. Good-by," and he and Sarah turned and rode away.

But he was on his guard.

He looked back and saw one of them preparing to fire on him. He wheeled his horse round, threw himself alongside of him, and fired under his neck at the redskin.

So quick was it done, that the redskin was shot down ere he could get his rifle in position.

The other two, thinking to secure him before he could reload his rifle, uttered loud yells, and dashed forward with their tomahawks.

Kit quietly dropped to the ground on his feet, drew a pistol, and awaited the onset.

Crack! went the pistol, and a death yell burst from the redskin as he reeled off his pony.

The other made a dash for Sarah's horse, caught him by the bit, and darted away, leading the horse in a fast run.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed, "me great brave! Me get paleface maiden!"

Sarah was as white as a ghost. But in another minute she thought of the pistol she had long carried concealed in her dress.

Quickly drawing it, she fired at the redskin, the ball entering his side and giving him a mortal wound.

"Ugh!" grunted the astounded redskin, nearly doubling up on his pony, "paleface great brave, Injan die like dog," and a moment later he released his hold on the reins of her bridle and dropped to the ground.

"Thank God!" ejaculated Sarah, and a minute later Kit rode up, having mounted and followed them at full speed.

"Ah! Sarah!" he exclaimed on coming up, "you are as good a fighter as any man on the prairie. You brought that redskin down in old veteran style."

"Oh, Mr. Carson, this is perfectly horrible!"

"Why, it's the neatest little fight I ever saw, Sarah! Lord, what a wife you would be to a hunter!"

She laughed and asked:

"Are you hurt?"

"No; are you?"

"No; only scared half to death."

Kit roared with laughter, and said:

"You shall have his rifle, tomahawk and scalping-knife as a memento of the fight."

"What a man you are! Why not take his scalp, too?"

Kit laughed good-naturedly and said:

"Yes, I forgot about that. I'll get his scalp for you."

"Oh, mercy, please don't!" she cried, turning pale at the idea of such a thing.

He gathered the weapons of the dead savage, tied them together, and carried them with him as they went on their way.

"Well, well," she said. "Do the Indians do that way all the time?"

"Yes, whenever they get a chance. They never let an opportunity to rob, steal or kill pass. We have to be on our guard all the time."

"Oh, the wretches!"

"They are as bad as any wild beasts. The panthers are even more merciful than they are."

Night came on, still they were some score of miles from her home.

"I think we had better keep on," he said, "and reach home about midnight, as your mother must be very uneasy about you."

"Yes—I know she is. But if she knew that you were after them to rescue me she would be perfectly satisfied, as she thinks you can do anything."

"She is not a good judge of such things, you know."

They pushed forward under the clear starlight and made good time, and came in sight of the timber in which the Wadly cabin was situated about midnight.

"We must dismount now and walk the rest of the way," Kit said, "as we cannot ride through the woods at night."

He assisted her to the ground and led the way into the forest, the two horses following behind them.

They came in sight of the little cabin, and saw light under the door.

"I will knock at the door and give them a surprise," whispered Sarah. "You stay here a little while."

"Yes—give 'em a good old surprise," he returned.

She went softly up to the door and listened.

She heard low voices within, but could not make out anything that was said.

Then she rapped on the door with the tomahawk she carried in her hand.

A moment later the door opened, and a stalwart savage stood before her.

"Ugh!" he grunted, making an attempt to seize her.

She gave a scream and sprang back.

The Indian darted after her, and she hurled the tomahawk against his head with all her might.

He reeled under the blow like a drunken man, and saw a million stars.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SURPRISE AT THE CABIN—THE TWO STRANGERS.

As Sarah Wadly screamed and ran back from the cabin door, Kit Carson ran forward to meet her.

At the same time three other savages ran out of the cabin to see what the trouble was.

They were in full view in the light that came from the hearth within.

Crack! went Kit's rifle, and down went a redskin with a death-whoop.

Crack! went his pistol, and another Indian emigrated to the Happy Hunting Ground.

The third one yelled the war-whoop of his tribe and drew his tomahawk for active service.

Crack! went another pistol, and Kit turned to see who fired it.

It was Sarah.

She had laid out the first one by a blow from the tomahawk she carried in her hand, and seeing the fourth one near the door, in the light from within, she drew and fired.

The last Indian gave a yell, and staggered back into the house and tried to close the door.

Kit sprang forward and pushed the door open with such force as to send the redskin reeling across the room.

Sarah sprang after him and darted inside.

"Mother, father!" she cried, looking wildly around the room, "are you hurt? Where are you?"

"Thank God!" cried Mrs. Wadly from a corner of the room, where she was tied to a chair. "Our child is here, Nick!"

"Oh, mother!" screamed Sarah, rushing to her mother's side, "are you hurt?"

"No, my child," was the reply, "they came on us when we could make no resistance—caught your father asleep. How did you get away from them?"

Sarah pointed to Kit, who was standing in the middle of the room gazing sternly at the Indian who had been wounded by Sarah's pistol shot.

"Blessings on your head, Kit Carson!" cried the overjoyed mother. "You have ever been our friend in need!"

"Cut these cursed cords, Kit," said old Nick in the other corner, "and let me get at that redskin there."

"He's going, Nick," said Kit, stepping forward and cutting the cords that bound him. "Sarah gave him a ball from her pistol that will settle him."

The old man rose to his feet and grasped the hand of the scout in his. Their eyes met, but not a word passed between them.

The two brave men understood each other's feelings too well to give expression to them.

Sarah cut her mother loose, and then the daughter was gathered to their hearts in loving embraces.

"Oh, mother, I have had such a splendid time since Mr. Carson rescued me!" said Sarah, in the greatest good humor. "He carried me to a cabin where an old couple lived with two lovely daughters."

Mr. Hornady is there, and they are nursing him till he gets well again."

"Did you see Dick and Tom?" the old man asked. "They went on the trail after you."

"Oh, yes. They came up next morning—this morning it was. Dick is helping to take care of Mr. Hornady, and Tom has gone to Laramie with dispatches for Mr. Carson."

Sarah never seemed in higher spirits than at that moment. But Kit Carson was quiet, keeping his eye on the wounded Indian, who was still lying where he fell when the door pushed him down.

The savage kept an eye on Kit, too, and really they were both watching each other. Kit suspected the redskin of not being as badly hurt as he pretended to be, and the savage suspected the scout of being disposed to finish him if he moved from where he lay.

The rascal was really worse hurt than he at first thought, for he was bleeding inwardly and growing weaker every minute.

At last he commenced to sing his death-song.

Kit eyed him closely, and at last came to the conclusion that the Indian's life was ebbing away.

He sang of his exploits—of the number of scalps he had in his wigwam; how many bears he had slain, and all the deeds of his whole life.

"And at last you met your death at the hands of a young paleface maiden," put in Kit, as the Indian finished.

"Ugh! White maiden—heap—brave—good—shoot!" gasped the dying warrior.

"I didn't want to shoot you," said Sarah, "but you had attacked my parents."

"Ugh! maiden—right. Injun come—take paleface scalps. Injun die," and giving a gasp, as if for one more breath of life, he was dead.

"That's the last of the four," said Kit, taking him by the heels and dragging him through the open door.

"What!" cried Nick Wadly, in great amazement, "did you kill the other three?"

"Well, I killed two, and your little girl there got away with the other two," replied Kit.

Old Nick turned and hugged Sarah to his heart again.

"You are a jewel of a girl," the old man said. "Your old father is proud of you."

Sarah laughed and said:

"I shot another one to-day, too. Really I am getting to be a regular Indian fighter. I never dreamed I would ever do such a thing."

"Oh, you are capable of doing much more than that, Sarah," said Kit, as he came back into the hut.

"Let's take 'em away to the creek," said old Nick. "It won't do to let 'em lie there all night."

The two men then carried the dead redskins down to the creek and threw them into the swift current.

The mother and daughter kept the door and window securely fastened till the work of removing the bodies was done.

Then the two men returned, sat down by the fire and waited till the mother and daughter cooked a supper of venison stakes, and bread and coffee.

Kit and Sarah were very hungry after their long ride, and did ample justice to the supper, late as it was. The parents were so happy at having their daughter restored to them, that they joined them in the supper, and ate as heartily as they did.

The supper over with, Kit was given a place to sleep, and all retired, after first securing the door and window against being opened from the outside.

When they awoke the sun was peeping through the trees, and everything gave the promise of a lovely day.

Kit went to look after his horse and Hornady's. He wandered some distance into the woods, preferring to find the horses instead of having them come to him in response to his call.

He finally found them quietly grazing where the grass was good and plentiful. That was all he wanted to know, and so he returned toward the house.

Just before reaching the house he saw two white men, dressed as hunters, mounted on powerful horses and armed to the teeth, ride up before the cabin and dismount.

Nick Wadly came to the door and gave them a searching glance. They were white men, and that fact reassured him.

"Hello, stranger!" one of the new-comers greeted the old man.

"Hello, strangers!" the old man returned.

"Do you run this shanty?"

"Well, mean' my old woman an' daughter do," replied Wadly.

"Oh, you do, eh? Well, have you got anything a hungry man can eat? We are as hungry as coyotes after a hard winter."

"We always have something to eat on hand. Come in. We will have breakfast in a few minutes."

"Now, that's the kinder talk I like, stranger," said the taller of the two men, leading his horse to a bush and tying him there. "Have you got anything good to drink?"

"We have some cold water, and will have hot coffee for breakfast soon," was the old man's reply, as he stood in the door of the cabin.

"Cold water bejiggered!" exclaimed the man. "I ain't swallowed any of that stuff in ten years. Got any brandy or rum?"

"No," was the very curt reply. The old man didn't like their tone or looks.

Just then Sarah Wadly passed out of the door with a pail in her hands to go to the spring for water.

Her beauty seemed to stagger the leader for a moment. He gazed

after her as she tripped lightly along the path that led to the spring, and asked:

"Is that your daughter?"

"Yes," the old man replied.

"Well, she's a stunner. Ain't married, eh?"

"No."

"My name's 'Grizzly Bill,' the best man this side the Rockies, an' my pard's name's Sam Joves. They call him 'Slashing Sam' in the mines."

"My name is Nick Wadly," quietly returned the old man; "come in and stop your blowing with a hot breakfast."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PUZZLED BULLIES.

THE quiet way of the old man caused the two men to look more closely at him for a moment, and then they both entered the cabin and sat down near the fire-place.

"Where do you come from, strangers?" the old man asked.

"From down the river," replied the taller of the two.

"What's the news down there?"

"Plenty of redskins, and they're ugly, too."

"Yes—they are all in a bad humor this season," said the old man.

"I don't know what has come over them all of a sudden."

"Have they been round here?"

"Oh, yes; but we persuaded them to leave."

"How?"

"Powder and lead."

"Oh, you fought 'em, eh?" and then the taller of the two looked at the door, where half a hundred tomahawks had left impressions.

"Yes, we induced them to go away," remarked the old man.

Just then Sarah returned with the pail of water, and proceeded to assist her mother in preparing the breakfast.

The two men began to blow about who they were and what a terror their names were to the redskins, when the old man interrupted them with:

"Breakfast is ready. Please stop blowing, and take in something more substantial. Do you take coffee?"

"Thunder an' greased lightning, stranger!" exclaimed the man "Grizzly Bill," "do you want to insult us?"

"Oh, not—not a bit. Have some of this venison steak."

Grizzly Bill drew a big bowie, and flourishing it above his head, said:

"The man who calls my talk blowing is got to take it back or die!"

"How about the girl that calls it brag?" Sarah asked.

The bully looked around and espied a pistol in the hand of the intrepid girl. The weapon was held in range of his head.

"I—I—aint got nothing to—say against—a woman!" the fellow stammered.

"Neither have you anything to say against anybody else in this house," said Sarah; "so eat your breakfast like a decent white man, and go about your business."

The bully was so completely cut up, that it took all his appetite away. Old Nick Wadly chuckled, and concluded to do a little blowing just for the fun of the thing.

"The girl's right, stranger," he said; "eat your breakfast. She knows her business all the way through. She's a chip of the old block. I've seen her clean out a half dozen redskins in just three minutes, an' some of 'em didn't hardly know what hurt 'em. The old woman there ain't slow, neither. We don't mind a tussle with two or three dozen redskins once a week, do we, old woman?"

"Well, not much," replied the old wife, tumbling to the object of her husband.

"Great gosh!" ejaculated Grizzly Bill, staring at the mother and daughter as though they were people from the other side of Jordan.

"You see we ain't the kind you took us for," said the old man, smiling; "so eat your breakfast and tell us good-by."

"And come and see us next year," put in Sarah; "and we will be ever so glad to see you leave."

Grizzly Bill and Slashing Sam were so completely cut up that they could not eat a mouthful. All the appetite as well as brag was taken out of them.

"See here, pard," said Grizzly Bill to his comrade. "We ain't wanted here. Let's go where——"

"Now you two fools just eat your breakfast," said Sarah, "or we'll feed the coyotes with you. We only want to learn you a little sense. Never brag about what you can do. It tells people that you are a barking dog instead of a fighting. Now eat your breakfast, and we'll forgive you."

They did eat, though they had but little appetite for the meal. They had intended to kick the old man about and make the mother and daughter tremble and beg for him. They were simply cut-throat bullies, without one particle of manly courage.

Just before they finished the meal Kit Carson entered.

"Come and have some breakfast, Kit," the old man said. "This man here says his name is 'Grizzly Bill,' and that he is the best man this side of the Rockies. The other man's name's 'Slashing Sam.' This is Kit Carson, gentlemen, maybe you know him."

Both men had heard of the King of Scouts, and trembled in their boots lest he had heard of them. They looked up at the bronzed face of the scout about as a boy would look at an enemy whose intentions were in doubt.

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance, gentlemen," said Kit, as he took his seat at the table. "I have often heard of the 'best

man this side of the Rockies,' and wanted to see him. I haven't got anything against you, Grizzly Bill, understand, and I'm a man of peace. I'm not much on the shoot. There's my hand—put it there," and he extended his hand toward the astounded bully, who took it in a mechanical sort of way.

"Them's my sentiments, pard," he finally said, shaking Kit's hand warmly. "I'm as pleasant as a humming bird."

"Glad to hear that," returned Kit. "Hope Slashing Sam won't undertake to slash around here any."

"Oh, I never slash till I git after the redskins," said Slashing Sam, "and they all know my whoop."

Both bullies had begun to suspect that it was not Kit Carson, and that the old man was trying to outblow them. Sarah was a puzzle to them, though, with that pistol in her hand. They didn't understand that part of the business, for she looked and talked like a girl who would shoot on short notice.

They ate and watched everyone around them. Never were men in greater doubt of their company than they were.

When they were through old Nick said:

"Have a smoke, gentlemen," and offered them pipes and tobacco. They took them, and in a few minutes they were sending up clouds of smoke above their heads, as were Kit and the old man also.

"Ain't got any rum?" Grizzly Bill asked.

"No—never keep it," was the reply.

"Well, you'd find it mighty consoling if you did."

"My pipe is consoling enough for me," said Wadly. "Men who drink rum don't amount to much. It's a mighty degrading drink."

Grizzly Bill looked at the old man in a way that plainly said:

"I'd go for you if I dared."

When the pipes were finished the old man said:

"Your horses are ready for you, gentlemen."

"Yes, we must go," said Grizzly Bill, rising; "much obliged for the breakfast. If ever you want a friend, call on Grizzly Bill, and I'm there every time."

"Thank you," was the reply. "Hope I may never need a better friend than my own right arm. Good-by. Be good boys. Keep out of bad company, and you'll never be hung."

The two bullies mounted their horses and rode away, looking back at pretty Sarah as she stood in the doorway by the side of her mother.

The old man dropped into his chair when they were gone and laughed till the tears ran down his face. Kit joined him, and when the old man told him how Sarah had held a pistol over them and made them eat, the scout laughed as he was never known to laugh before.

"Ah, Sarah," he said, "you'll be the death of me yet! If poor Tom O'Neill was here, how he would roll and roar!"

"I only wish he and Mr. Hornady and Mr. Mason had been here," she said. "We would have had some fun with them."

"Oh, we had fun enough with them," said Kit. "Depend upon it, they will never forgive you for this morning's work."

"Oh, I don't care anything for their love or hate," replied the old man. "Such cowards will never do us any harm. They'll be too smart to bother us again."

"You'll hear from them again. They went off vowing vengeance for their humiliation. They'll come back again with more of their numbers."

"I hope they will!" said the old man, "for I'd like to get into a row with 'em once."

"They won't come back again," Sarah remarked.

"They will come back after you, Sarah," Kit said, "and they may give you some trouble yet. Look out for them. I must go now, and see how Ben is getting along. I must carry his horse back, you know."

"How I wish I could go with you," said Sarah. "I am beginning to love the wild prairie as much as you do, Mr. Carson."

"You should not do that, my dear child. Leave such a life to men. You are destined to make some man a happy husband, so don't try to dodge your mission."

"Oh, pshaw!" she ejaculated.

Kit shook hands with the old man and his wife, kissed Sarah, mounted his horse, and telling the other horse to follow, rode away toward the end of the timber.

Out on the prairie he saw the two bullies some three miles ahead of him, going in the same direction as himself. They noticed him coming, and slackened the speed of their animals, that he might catch up with them.

CHAPTER XXVII.

KIT CARSON MAKES A RUNNING FIGHT.

THE scout saw them slacken their speed, and suspected that they meant to try conclusions with him, being two to one.

"Ah, they mean to get even with me and get two horses in the bargain," he said to himself as he rode forward. "I will give them a chance, if such is their desire."

In an hour he caught up with them.

"Hello!" cried Grizzly Bill. "Didn't know you were going our way."

"Neither did I know you were going my way," he replied. "Where are you going, anyway?"

"Up the river."

"Well, you're getting a good ways away from the river."

"We've got to go by a friend's over on the South Fork."

"Oh, yes."

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going northwest, I believe."

The vague reply caused the two bullies to look significantly at each other, and Kit thought he saw a signal pass between them.

Slashing Sam tried to drop behind them as they rode, but the scout managed to prevent it every time he attempted it. He kept them a little before him all the time, until they saw that he suspected them, after which they changed their tactics.

They both became very sociable, but Kit kept them at a distance, in spite of all they could do, letting them see that he was prepared to act in a lightning's flash.

Suddenly a band of something like a score of Indians came out of a piece of timber, some three miles away on the right, and gave chase to them.

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Slashing Sam, turning pale, "there's too many of them for us. We must run for it, pard."

"Yes," said Grizzly Bill, "we can't tackle so many all at once."

"Why, I thought you were the best man this side the Rockies?" said Kit.

"Well, I don't want to tackle twenty redskins at once!"

"You won't have to tackle twenty," was the reply. "I'll take ten for my share, and you two can have five each."

"Too many," said Grizzly Bill, shaking his head and glancing uneasily at the band of Indians, who were coming up at a round pace.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" exclaimed Kit. "Are you a coward?"

"No!" thundered Grizzly Bill, "nor I ain't a fool, either," and he put spurs to his horse and dashed away, with Slashing Sam at his heels.

"Cowards!" hissed Kit, loud enough for them to hear. But they paid no attention to him. The best man "this side the Rockies" was for placing his hair out of the reach of danger as quickly as possible.

To his infinite delight the Indians divided. Five of them made a bee-line for him, and some fifteen put out for the two flying bullies.

Kit stood still and waited for the five savages to come up, determined to throw them off their guard and get away with them ere they could tumble to his game.

They dashed up to him, greatly astonished at his calmness, and looked hard at him.

"Hello, redskins!" Kit greeted. "Why don't you catch those two fellows out there? One is Kit Carson and the other is Strong Knife."

"Ugh! We catch you!" replied the leader.

"Oh, that's all right. I'm the friend of the redman."

"Who you? Injun don't know."

"I'm a white man, of course, and will go with you."

"Ugh! Give gun here," and the redskin made an attempt to take the scout's rifle.

Kit waited for him to get near enough to reach him, and the bowie flashed in the sunlight for a moment, and whizzed by the neck of the savage.

It also flashed through the jugular of the redskin, and he reeled in his saddle like a drunken man ere the others suspected what had been done.

The next moment a brace of pistols in the scout's hands emptied two more saddles, and then the other two savages became suddenly aware that they had caught a Tartar.

They uttered two war-whoops and made a dash at him. One he brained with his heavy pistol, and then slipped behind his horse to dodge the bullet of the last one.

The fifth Indian had also dodged the same way, and was trying to get in a shot from under his horse's neck.

Round and round they rode, each trying to get a shot at the other. The savage yelled to draw others to his assistance. Kit, however, kept his eye on the Indian's horse, watching for a chance to get in a shot at any exposed part of his foe.

At last he got a chance at the redskin's shoulder, and the next moment the redman had a broken arm.

In the position he was at the time he dropped heavily to the ground, giving a howl of rage as he went down.

Kit didn't care to do him any further harm, but rode off in the direction of the main body, who by this time had about caught up with Grizzly Bill and Slashing Sam.

The two men had shot down two Indians, but were quickly overpowered and made prisoners.

The redskins howled in triumph over the capture, and turned to look for the other five who had gone after Kit Carson.

To their surprise they saw the five ponies running riderless about the plains, and the solitary white man moving majestically toward them.

They were in a quandary, and asked of Grizzly Bill:

"Who white man?"

"Kit Carson," he replied, and then swore at himself for not standing by the great scout and fight.

"Ugh!" grunted the chief. "Great brave! Heap big warrior—kill five Injuns!"

Then they held a short consultation. They well knew the terrible character of his fighting, and had little desire to meet him, except when numerically strong enough to give them a sure thing of it.

There being a dozen of them, their chief gave a yell and charged at full speed toward him, leaving but two warriors to guard the two prisoners.

"Now, Rocket," said the great scout to his horse, "show them a clean pair of heels!"

Rocket turned suddenly to the right, and dashed away like the wind.

The savages accepted that as cowardice, and pursued him with wild yells.

But Rocket was not to be overtaken by Indian ponies. He was as swift as an Arab courser, and left the pursuers several miles behind in a little while.

Then he stopped and waited for the savages to come up.

In every party there are horses that have more speed than others. In this case the pursuers were strung out in a line—the best ponies leading.

When within a few hundred yards of him Kit urged Rocket forward, and he met the redskin when he was at least two hundred yards from the next one.

"Whoop!" the Indian yelled, drawing his tomahawk and trying to cut him down as they met.

But Kit was just out of his reach. A pistol shot was heard—a yell followed, and the redskin went down to rise no more.

Swift as the whirlwind he passed on and met the other. The meeting was brief. The other pistol settled the career of the redskin, and the next moment another pony was running riderless over the plains.

The third one caught a bullet from the rifle, and then Rocket turned his heels to the pursuers again, and left them something to think about.

The redskins yelled and howled their rage when they came up and saw how one man had gotten away with three of their number.

It was resolved to pursue him further, but to keep together in a body.

The two prisoners were brought up in the rear, and then the pursuit was resumed.

Kit kept about a mile ahead of them, and thus tantalized them. They could get no nearer, try hard as they would, and this was the distance between them when the sun went down.

When night came on it found them skirting a piece of timber. Kit knew they would stop and encamp in the woods as soon as it became too dark for them to follow his trail.

At last, when darkness set in, he turned and made a rapid circuit, getting in the rear of the redskins and following them up till they stopped to camp for the night.

Then he crept into the bushes and waited and watched for the chance to put in some of his fine work. He did not have to wait long, for they were in a rage over their losses during the day, and wanted some measure of revenge out of the two prisoners they had with them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TORTURE AND THE STAKE.

THE reader will remember that Kit Carson had charge of Ben Hornady's horse, which he was taking back to the cabin of the old Mexican, where his comrade was confined by a wound on the head.

The horse followed right behind all the way, whichever direction he went, and gave him no trouble whatever.

When the great scout turned into the bushes to watch the camp of the redskins, he left the two horses in a safe place in the woods and crept forward to his work.

He had not been long there, however, before he heard a noise in the direction of the horses that convinced him that something was wrong.

Suddenly a sharp bark and then a cry of pain told him that a wolf or wolves had attempted some familiarities with the faithful animals and were getting punished for their temerity.

He would not have gone back there but for the fact that two redskins, thinking their own ponies had been run off by the wolves, went out into the bushes to look after them.

"Ah! They will have to look for you two," muttered Kit, as he turned and followed them through the thicket.

It was very dark, but still Kit could manage to get through the woods in the night about as well as any owl. He came up behind one of them and drew his bowie across his throat from left to right with such force as to nearly sever it.

Down went the aborigine without a groan. The other, not over ten feet away, did not suspect any danger. He turned and came back to Kit, thinking he was his comrade.

Swish! went the bowie, and "Strong Knife" had done his work in so quiet a way that no alarm had been given.

"That's getting in good work," he said to himself; "and now I'll see if I can't get the benefit of it."

He dragged the first one to the foot of a tree on the lower side of the camp, placed him against it, and set the severed head in his lap.

The second one was placed higher up on the west side of the camp, and then he returned to his hiding-place to watch further developments, the wolves having been frightened away.

The Indians had determined on having some fun out of the two prisoners; bound them securely to a couple of saplings, and then commenced a series of tortures that made the victims howl with pain.

"Say, you redskins!" yelled Grizzly Bill, "what in blazes do you want to kill us for? We want to become Indians and join your tribe. You ain't got no better warriors than we are. I'm the best man this side the Rockies. We were looking for you when you caught us."

"Ugh! Paleface be a big lie," retorted the chief. "Paleface cry like squaw. Him no brave. T'other paleface great brave—heap fight."

"Oh, we didn't want to fight," said Slashing Sam; "we merely shot down one apiece just to show you what we could do."

"Me show you what Injun can do," replied the chief, taking up a stick from the fire and punching him in the side with the charred end.

"Ouch! Oh, whoop! Lord gosh!" screeched Sam, squirming like an impaled worm. "If I had—ouch! Oh—o-o-o-h! Gosh all mighty. Take that stick away!"

The Indians laughed in the greatest glee, and surrounded Sam to enjoy the antics of the blower.

"Oh, redskins!" he pleaded at last, "make an Indian of me and stop this. You want all the help you can get. I can lead you where you'll find money, whisky and women all you want. I know where two wagon trains are—ouch! Stop it! Murder! murder!"

"Ugh! Paleface great brave! Make more noise than all the pap-poooses."

"So would you if—oh, Lord, Bill!" and he squirmed with a desperation that amounted to madness. He raved like a maniac and suddenly wrenched himself loose, seized a tomahawk from an Indian, cut him down with it and darted for the bushes. But they pounced upon him and a desperate hand-to-hand struggle ensued, in which the infuriated white man succeeded in killing three of his assailants before he was overpowered.

But the odds were too great for him, and he was at last bound again a helpless prisoner.

"Blast your cowardly heart," he cried, looking at Grizzly Bill, "if you had done as I did we would have cleaned 'em out and got away!"

"How could I?"

"Why didn't you do as I did?" Sam angrily demanded.

"I was tied up."

"So was I!"

The redskins were dismayed at the terrific fight Sam had put up, and were angry enough to burn him at the stake.

They now had some respect for him, and let him alone. But Grizzly Bill now had to bear the brunt of their ridicule and torture.

That worthy howled and begged—cursed and swore with a sulphurous energy, at which the Indians only laughed.

Kit Carson had little sympathy for them, for he was satisfied they were nothing but thieves and robbers, perhaps murderers, and did not intend to risk his life for theirs, unless the redskins proceeded to extremities with them.

He admired the plucky fight of the younger of the two, though he had whined and begged like a whipped spaniel before that.

"They can both fight well," he muttered to himself, as he lay in his place of concealment and looked on, "only they are at heart cowards. Were they brave-hearted men they would be a terror to the redskins."

Grizzly Bill begged and whined worse than Sam did, but that made the painted wretches all the more relentless.

At last midnight approached, and they concluded to burn Slashing Sam at the stake for the death of the three braves he had killed in his attempt to escape.

When he was told of the fate that awaited him, Slashing Sam nerved himself for a desperate attempt to escape. He saw the preparations that were being made to burn him. He said nothing—made no reply to the taunts of the red devils, but pressed his lips together in a terrible resolve to wait till they removed him to the stake and attempt to tie him to it.

Kit Carson saw that the worst was coming, and that the intended victim would be in a frame of mind to do some terrible work if he could only get loose and get a weapon in his hands.

Everything being in readiness the savages came and took him up and bore him to the stake. To his surprise they did not give him the chance that he expected.

He was too securely bound. They held him too firmly. He made the effort, but he could only squirm in his bonds, and at last he gave up with a groan, and became as limp as a wet rag in their hands.

"Ugh! Paleface give up!" grunted one of the redskins.

"Sam's features were of a death-like pallor. He saw that his time had come, and he was unprepared for it.

Few men are prepared to die when the time comes. Many say they are when on their death-beds, but it's because they can't help themselves. They are honest in their saying, because they believe it, but if time was offered them they would be very apt to postpone their demise.

Fagots were heaped up around him waist high as he was tied to a green sapling facing Grizzly Bill, not twenty feet from him.

"Oh, my God, Sam!" groaned Bill, "this is awful! I never thought we would come to this!"

"It has come, Bill," said Sam, perfectly overwhelmed by the awful fate impending. "We can't dodge it; I'm going to meet it like a man. It won't last long. It will soon be over," and then he shuddered at the thought of the red tongues of flame lapping all round him and consuming him literally in their hungry heat.

Suddenly there was a terrific yell at the lower end of the camp, just in the edge of the bushes.

An Indian searching for fagots had run across one of the dead bodies holding a severed head in its hands.

Every savage drew his tomahawk and ran forward so see what the trouble was.

This was what Kit Carson was waiting for.

He darted out of the bushes and rushed over to the stake and cut Sam loose. Sam recognized him in an instant.

"Get your weapons, quick!" whispered Kit, "and come into the bushes!"

Sam did so.

"Oh, my God!" yelled Grizzly Bill, "don't leave me! For God's sake, don't leave me!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOT WORK—"REVENGE IS SWEET."

THE cowardly cry of Grizzly Bill caused him to be left, as Kit was going to go to him when his cry caused the savages to turn and dart back in time to prevent his escape.

But Sam and Kit got away into the woods together. The savages could not follow them, for no trail could be seen in the dark.

"God bless you!" exclaimed Sam, in a low tone, as soon as he could turn and grasp Kit's hand in his.

"Oh, that's all right," said Kit. "Just keep along with me, and we'll get your pard away from 'em. If he had said nothing I could have brought him along, too."

"Oh, he's scared to death."

The savages howled and went as far into the bushes as they dared to in the dark. They were all the more troubled now that "Strong Knife" was in their vicinity.

Slashing Sam was pretty well armed, and was ready to charge the whole band if Kit said so. He was now a changed man. He knew what he could do when he fought like one fighting for life.

Kit whispered to him that he had cut off the heads of two of the redskins and placed them in the laps of the dead bodies, for the others to find.

"That was what made 'em yell and run into the bushes."

"Good! Can't we do it again, and get a chance to get Bill out of their clutches?"

"There's another one which they have not found yet. Let's wait and see how it will work."

The excited savages were so much exercised over the discovery that "Strong Knife" was about that they paid but little attention to the other prisoner.

But Grizzly Bill was sore afraid that Sam and Kit had left him to his fate.

He yelled at the top of his voice:

"Oh, for God's sake don't leave me, Sam! Kit Carson, don't leave me to be burned alive!"

"Close your mouth!" yelled Sam back at him.

The savages made a rush into the bushes in the hope of recapturing him.

But Kit got him away in time to avoid a hand-to-hand fight, and said to him:

"I'll go round to the other side and make a noise sufficient to draw them where they'll be sure to see the other headless trunk. That'll make 'em whoop and yell like all-possessed. Then we can rush in and bring Bill out."

"Just the thing. I'll be ready to run in as soon as they go over to your side, and cut him loose."

"Don't make any mistake, now," cautioned Kit. "I'll signal to you as the whippoorwill where to meet me after we get him away."

Kit then crept around to the opposite side of the camp, and stopped a little distance beyond the place where the other headless Indian was sitting.

There he made a noise like one trying to creep around, purposely stepping on twigs that would snap and give him away.

The whole band heard the twigs snap, but only half ran forward to see about it.

They came across the headless corpse, and then a series of ear-piercing yells escaped them.

Instantly the others, thinking a fight was on hand, rushed into the bushes, and then Slashing Sam darted forward and cut Grizzly Bill loose.

Bill snatched up his rifle, which was leaning against a tree nearby, and darted into the bushes with Sam.

"This way," said Sam, leading the way around on the side he knew Kit Carson was. He wanted to be near that King of Scouts in the hour of danger.

Grizzly Bill followed him, and in a few moments they came across the scout.

"Let's get away from here," Bill suggested.

"No," replied Sam. "We are strong enough now to whip 'em, and we ought to do it. You want some satisfaction, don't you?"

"There's too many of 'em," said Bill, shaking his head.

"The 'best man this side the Rockies' ought not to talk that way," said Kit, sarcastically.

"If he doesn't fight the redskins he'll fight me," said Sam, who had discovered that he was a tough fighter.

"Oh, if you want to go in and fight I'm with you," said the cowardly bully. "I only thought we ought to go off and let well enough alone."

"It isn't well enough yet," said Sam.

"Come on—they are holding a council," whispered Kit, leading the way into the thicket whence he could see everything that was done by the redskins.

The savages were terribly frightened. They had heard of the mysterious "Strong Knife" and dreaded him more than any foe their race ever had.

They seemed to care for nothing but how to get away from "Strong Knife."

"Let's give 'em a volley," said Sam, bringing his rifle to his shoulder.

"Yes—let 'em have it," said Kit.

Three rifle shots rang out on the still night air, and three death yells followed.

That was the last feather. They broke and fled through the woods. Sam and Kit each caught one and held them.

Grizzly Bill seemed to be afraid to attempt to touch one.

Sam was fortunate enough to catch the one who had put him through so much torture when he was a prisoner.

"By the great horned frog!" he exclaimed. "If I don't give you a taste of your own medicine I'm no sinner, and a dominie once told me I was the chief of sinners! Halleluyah! Revenge is sweet! If Indian meat will burn I'll have a dance out of you, you child of the devil!"

"What are you going to do, Sam?" Bill asked, as he saw Sam tying the redskin securely.

"I'm going to give this fellow some of his own medicine."

Kit looked on and let the fellow have his way. He had seen him suffer great torture, and had quite an admiration for his fighting qualities.

When he had his prisoner fast to a sapling Sam took a chunk of fire from the camp and applied it to the redskin's naked belly.

The savage tried to bear it with that stoicism of his race, but he could not.

A yell of pain escaped him despite of a desperate effort to keep it in.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sam. "Redskin great coward! He cries like pappoose! How's this, eh?" and he slapped the fire-brand against the prisoner's naked side.

A wild, agonizing yell followed.

"Oh, you like it, don't you? You danced around me, and laughed at my agony! I'll be laid up a month with my burns. I guess you'll have a sympathy for me before you get over it. How does this feel?" And he drew the fire-brand around and up and down his body with a fiendish relentlessness.

Nothing is more painful to the human body than fire. No strength of will can make one endure it quietly. The Indian is supposed to be more able to stand it than any other, but Sam demonstrated that it hurt one of that race just as much as any other.

Finally Kit Carson said:

"That'll do. Don't kill him. Let him go and spread the terror of your name among the tribes."

Sam cut him loose, gave him a tremendous kick, and then sent him into the bushes. The other one was permitted to follow him, Kit Carson telling him to go.

"Why in blazes didn't you kill the vipers?" Grizzly Bill demanded.

"I don't do that way. I never murder. I only kill in fair fight."

Grizzly Bill looked at the great scout in utter amazement, and said:

"You must be the devil in a fight. You nearly licked the whole band to-day."

"Which we could have done very easily had not the best man this side the Rockies been a coward."

"See here, pard," said Bill, "I own up. I'm the biggest coward this side the Rockies. I ain't got no business out here among these redskins. Just put it there, and say no more about it," and he held out his hand to Kit, who took it.

"Now look here, my friend," he said, "let me give you some advice that may be of some use to you. Never brag again. Every fool knows that only cowards brag. Whenever you meet a redskin who wants to fight always give him your best, and you'll come out ahead every time. It's safer to fight an Indian than to run from him. Your pard proved that to-night. He made the prettiest fight I ever saw. I thought he was a coward, but he is not. He didn't know what he could do till he tried."

"That's so," said Sam, "and I'll give any man a chance hereafter, who wants to know what I can do. I'll give the redskins something to think about hereafter."

"Come, let's see about our horses," said Kit. "I don't think we ought to remain here till morning," and he led the way into the woods in search of his horse.

CHAPTER XXX.

A DOUBLE MARRIAGE.

WHEN he had gone a little ways into the forest, Kit thought it best to signal for his horse to come to him, and he did so.

Rocket came, but Hornady's horse did not.

"This won't do," he said, and then he commenced a search in the woods for the horse. Bill and Sam looked about among the Indian ponies till they recovered their horses.

A long search at last found Ben's horse, which had got separated from Rocket and didn't understand the scout's signal.

It was daylight when they started out again.

Kit did not want to carry two such characters as Grizzly Bill and Slashing Sam to the cabin of old Vega. He knew the two lovely daughters of the old Mexican would be troubled by their attentions.

"Well," he said to them, after they had ridden till noon together, "I must go away out of my way to see a sick friend, so we must part here. I hope we may meet again, and that we may all be better men when we do."

"Sorry to leave you, pard," said Sam, extending his hand to the scout, "but I'll always remember you as the man who taught me a good lesson."

"So will I," said Bill.

"So we part good friends, do we?" said Kit.

"Yes, yes," they both responded.

"Good-b', then," and Kit put spurs to his horse and was off like a whirl, leaving two men to pursue their way together over the plain.

In an hour Kit was out of sight, passing behind a strip of timber and pushing rapidly toward the home of the old Mexican.

It was late in the afternoon when he struck the timber.

Dis-mounting, he pushed his way through the woods on foot, and came in sight of the cabin a half hour after.

But he saw something else beside the cabin that attracted his attention. It was the sight of Dick Mason and the old Mexican's youngest daughter sitting side by side on a log. Dick's arm was encircling her slender waist, and he was whispering softly to her.

A glow of joy was on her dark, sweet face, and her eyes beamed with the light of love.

"Ah! the boy has found a mate at last!" muttered Kit, as he picked up a small stone and threw it at the young lovers' feet.

Dick sprang up and placed a hand on his pistol. He was always armed, and ready for any foe.

"Well, Dick, my boy," the king scout greeted, "how are you getting along?"

"Never better in my life," replied the young hunter, blushing to the roots of his hair.

"Oh, Senor Carson!" cried Maria, running forward and kissing the scout, "I am so glad you have come!"

"Are you, indeed, senorita?" he asked, giving her a sly glance out of the corner of his eye. "I rather think Dick doesn't like my coming just at this time—eh, Dick, old boy?"

"Oh, that's all right, pard," said Dick. "She's mine. She's engaged to me. I want you to arrange it with her father for us. I love her, and——"

"You leave Sarah to Tom, then, do you?" Kit asked, laughing good-naturedly.

"Yes, or to you, if you want her," was the reply.

"Thanks for your kindness. Of course I will talk to the old man about it. You have both done a wise thing. She will make you a good little wife, Dick."

"I know she will, pard," and the happy fellow wrung the scout's hand in excess of joy. "You'll bring the old man round, won't you?"

"Oh, yes. There'll be no trouble about that. Be happy and love each other all you can. I give you my blessing in advance. How is Ben?"

"Better—much better," replied Dick, "almost well."

"Glad to hear that."

"Oh, Senor Carson, his head gets better," said Maria, "but his heart gets worse every day."

"What in thunder do you mean?" Kit asked, turning suddenly and giving her a searching glance.

"My sister," was all she said.

Kit comprehended her meaning.

Ben Hornady had fallen in love with his pretty nurse—the dark and fiery Isabel.

"Ah! I might have known it," he said. "How is she? Is she kind to him?"

"Yes, senor. Her heart is in trouble, too," and the silvery laugh of the young maiden told plainly her heart was full of joy since the bold young hunter had told her he loved her.

"I'll go in and see him," said Kit, turning and leaving the young couple alone together.

Old Vega met him at the door of the hut and welcomed him.

"Hello, pard!" exclaimed Ben, on seeing Kit enter the door. "You might have stayed a week longer, and I wouldn't have complained. How did you find things at the Wadlys?"

"We found the Indians in possession of the cabin," said Kit, "and the old couple tied up hard and fast."

"Jerusalem!" ejaculated Ben.

"Yes, and it would have done your heart good to have seen Sarah go in. She gave a redskin a whack with a tomahawk that laid his head open. Then she drew a pistol and sent another to his long home. I went in and helped her, and in less than two minutes her parents were free again."

"Great blars, pard! why don't you marry that girl?"

"Because so many of you fellows are around, turning her head, that she won't listen to me," Kit replied. "When you and Dick and Tom are disposed of, then I may have a show."

Isabel pretended not to hear what was said, but gave him a warm welcome, and was about to retire to give him a chance to talk to Ben.

"Don't leave, please," Ben said to her. "I want you to hear me tell my pard that I never made love to any woman in my life—that Sarah Wadly never once entered my head, much less my heart."

"Now, look here, pard," said Kit, laughing, "I understand it all perfectly well. You have fallen in love with your nurse—come back, Isabel! I am the friend of both of you, and I want to put you out of suspense. Ben is a good man—will make a good husband. He loves you devotedly. Will you marry him?"

Kit had caught her by the hand and detained her. Otherwise she would have fled from him.

"That's so, Isabel," said Ben, taking her hand in his. "I love you—be my wife."

She turned and threw herself into Hornady's arms, and Kit Carson exclaimed:

"That's two scalps in my belt to-day! Old man, you have two sons born to you this day—both full grown, with hair and teeth."

Ben roared with laughter, though he still held the happy maiden to his heart.

"Dick has just popped the question to Maria outside here," said Kit. "I am glad to get them out of my way. I must either find a wife for Tom or shoot him."

Such a happy family as they were that day!

The old couple gave their consent to the marriage of their daughters, and, as Kit was a Territorial magistrate as well as a scout, he married them then and there, to end their misery.

That was more than the lovers expected, and so happy were they all that they acted like young children during the entire day.

Ben Hornady recovered from his wound in a few days, and then he and Dick Mason, now that they were brothers-in-law, went to work and built two double log cabins close by that of the old couple, and furnished them with everything they could get or make, to make their wives comfortable and happy. The old couple had things enough stored away in the cave back of their hut to furnish a dozen log cabins, and they gave liberally to their daughters.

"Now, boys," said Kit to the happy husbands, "you will stay here, of course, for some time. I must go on with my scouting, you know. In a month I'll come back and see if you are as happy as you are now. Good-by."

Kit rode away thinking it would be better for him to follow the example of Ben and Dick. But he was in the government service as a scout, and could not stop to marry now. It was his duty to watch the Indians and report their movements to the nearest military post, and do all he could to protect emigrant trains on the prairie.

Suddenly he thought that Tom O'Neill might bring dispatches to him, and he wondered if Tom would not go round by the Wadly cabin on his way back.

"It's fifty miles out of his way," said he, "but that's nothing to him when he can get a chance to see Sarah. I'll go over there and meet him."

He turned his horse's head in that direction and made a mental calculation as to the time it would take him to reach the cabin.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TWO GUIDES MEET.

On his way over the prairie to visit the Wadly family again Kit Carson lost no time, as he was impressed with the idea that Tom O'Neill would bring important dispatches for him, which he was eager to get and learn their contents.

Late in the day he saw a small wagon train moving slowly westward. A band of Indians were watching it some three or four miles away.

"They'll have trouble to-night," he said, "and I am really sorry I have seen them, for I cannot leave them to the mercy of those redskins out there."

He turned Rocket's head in the direction of the train, and in another hour he had caught up with it.

It consisted of seven wagons and eighteen men and eleven women. There was only one child—a babe—in this party.

"Hello, stranger!" called out the guide on seeing him.

"Hello! Are you the guide?"

"Yes, I reckon I am."

"You've seen those Indians out there, have you?"

"I reckon we have, stranger, an' they've seen us, too."

"On, they tried it on, did they?"

"Reckon they did, an' I reckon as how they ain't fools enough to do it agin—not much."

"Glad to hear that," said Kit. "You don't need any help, then?"

"Reckon not, stranger. The redskins don't hanker arter old Joe Murray arter they once tackle 'im—oh, no!"

Kit looked hard at the old guide and said:

"So you are Joe Murray, are you? I've often heard of you, Joe, and wanted to meet you. Maybe you've heard of me—Kit Carson?"

"Prairie dogs an' rattlers!" exclaimed old Joe, glaring at Kit as though he were the President of the United States. "Why, pard, I'm doggone glad to see you!" and he grasped the scout's hand in a grip that would have crushed a brick. "Whoop! here's Kit Carson, boys, the best man that ever sneezed at the sun!"

Every man of the train had heard of the great scout, and naturally wanted to see him. They crowded around and grasped his hands.

"Git right down, pard!" cried Joe Murray, "an' come ter the jug. We've got the juice that skulps malaria and tomahawks chills and fevers. It's just beautiful, pard, an' creeps right to the spot just as you do when you get arter the redskins. Boys, we're goin' to smile at Kit Carson!" and the enthusiastic old guide brought out a jug from the mysterious depths of one of the wagons and handed it over to Kit.

Kit took the jug, looked around at the crowd, and said:

"I am not a drinking man, boys, for drink has ruined more men than powder and lead has, but I'm so glad to meet old Joe that I will 'smile' with you—all smile," and he turned up the jug and "smole a smile," while the others grinned to keep him company.

The jug went round, and then was returned to the wagon considerably lighter than when it came out.

"Pard!" said jubilant Joe, "I'm so tarnal glad to see you that I'll stop the train and——"

"No, you won't," interrupted Kit, quickly, "for I haven't time to stop. I must push on. I hope you will have a safe trip across the country and——"

"By all the redskins in Tophet!" exclaimed Joe Murray, "I'd keep the train a week to stay with you, Kit Carson!"

"Oh, we'll meet again, Joe," said Kit, laughing. "Come up to Laramie when you come back, and go out on the trail with me. I'll promise you some fun."

"Great rattlers, pard, I'll do it!" cried Joe; "put it there, and look for old Joe Murray in about two months," and he put out his hand to Kit, who took it and wrung it with great satisfaction.

"I'll look for you," he said, "and will be glad to see you. I must go now."

He shook hands with the party and mounted his horse again. As he rode off the crowd gave him a cheer that sounded far and wide over the plains.

When he was a mile away the Indians thought he was a messenger going somewhere for help, and five of them put out to catch him.

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed old Joe Murray, when he saw them start. "How them redskins will be fooled! They'll find him the hottest potato they ever picked up in their lives."

And old Joe was right.

Kit saw them coming and did not spur up Rocket to go any faster in consequence.

On the contrary, he jogged along at a moderate pace, as though he had plenty of time and didn't mind being overtaken.

Joe Murray stopped the train and got up on top of the wagon to look at the meeting of the five Indians with the famous scout.

Kit waited till the Indians came up to him.

"Ugh!" grunted the chief, "paleface stop!"

"Hello, redskin! What do you want?"

"Want paleface," was the reply, as the chief reached out to take him by the collar.

Whiz! went the bowie, and the rascal's head was nearly severed from his shoulders.

Crack! Crack! went two pistol shots, and two more redmen went. Then his rifle swung round and covered the fourth one.

They gave a yell and turned away, trying to get out of range of the rifle.

But Kit was not in the humor to let them get away.

Crack! went the rifle, and a ball entered the redskin's back and sent him tumbling out of the saddle.

"Now for the other one!" cried Kit. "After him, Rocket!" and the noble animal dashed away like a whirlwind in pursuit of the now demoralized redskin.

How that Indian did urge his pony forward! How Joe Murray and the whole emigrant party did yell!

Swiftly the scout gained on the flying redskin, and then the collision came.

Kit seized him by his scalp-lock and dexterously twirled the bowie around it, and the next moment that Indian was scalplless!

Kit held up the scalp to the people with the train, and gave a whoop that startled even the redskins with its intensity of meaning.

Joe Murray yelled himself hoarse over the incident, and brought out the "little brown jug" again and passed it around in honor of the "best man who ever sneezed at the sun."

Kit rode away and gradually faded out of sight in the distance, whilst the scalplless Indian made his way toward a piece of timber, to live and suffer in silence rather than endure the taunts and sneers of his people.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE KING SCOUT AND TOM O'NEILL AGAIN.

It was quite late in the night—near midnight, in fact—when Kit Carson reached the timber in which the Wadlys lived.

As he wended his way through the woods to the cabin he came across another horse.

"Hello!" he muttered to himself. "Somebody else is here. I must be cautious, and not run into a hornet's nest."

Feeling of the saddle, however, he became convinced that it was a horse belonging to a white man.

"I'll wager that it's Tom O'Neill's horse," he said, and then he crept forward and knocked on the door.

"Who's there?" he heard old Nick Wadly ask.

"Tom O'Neill," he replied.

"By the piper as played afore Moses!" exclaimed Tom, who was inside. "Open the door an' let me get at the liar!"

"Ah! I thought you were there, Tom!" cried Kit, in a voice they all instantly recognized. "Open the door."

The door was thrown wide open, and the scout entered.

"I suspected that you would be here," he said, "instead of coming to Vega's cabin. You see I know your sly tricks, Tom O'Neill. You can't fool me. Did you bring any dispatches for me?"

"Yes—here's a letter from the commandant at Laramie," and blushing, Tom drew a sealed letter from his pocket and handed it to him.

The scout quickly opened it and devoured its contents.

They were eminently satisfactory to him, as the government was well pleased with his work.

"But who is 'Strong Knife?'" the commandant asked in the letter. "The redskins speak of a terrible character, who breaks up whole camps at night by cutting off the heads of Indians."

Kit smiled.

But he said nothing.

"Now, Mr. Carson," said Sarah, "you've read your letter, tell me how Isabel and Maria and Mr. Hornady and Mr. Mason are?"

"Oh, they are all well and happy," he replied. "Isabel and her husband have——"

"Her husband?" exclaimed Sarah, in unfeigned surprise.

"Yes, her husband, and——"

"Who is her husband?"

"Mr. Hornady."

"Good Lord!" burst from her lips. "Are they married?"

"Yes, and Dick Mason and Maria are married, too."

"Hold on there, pard!" cried O'Neill, "say that over again, and say it slow!"

"Dick and Maria are married," repeated the scout, "and are as happy as turtle doves."

"My pard married!" exclaimed Tom, looking around and then fastening his gaze on Sarah. "I can't believe it, and yet I'd be afther doing that same av I could foind the lass as would be my woife."

"Why, you don't want a woman to ask you to marry her, do ycu?" Sarah asked.

"Bedad, I wouldn't be afther saying no av the roight one asked me."

"Of course not," and she gave a laugh that set poor Tom's heart in a flutter. "If you do you'll die a bachelor."

"Why don't you out with it, Tom?" Kit asked.

"Out wid what, begorra?"

"With the secret. Tell Sarah that you are dying for love for her, and——"

"Oh, Mr. Carson!" screamed Sarah.

"Bedad, I'm thinking she knows that same, for it's thrue as the sunshine."

Sarah hid her face in her hands and tried to get away.

"Come now, Sarah!" cried Kit, "put the poor fellow out of his misery; if you love him let him kiss you, and——"

Tom darted forward, caught the brave girl in his arms and covered her face with kisses.

"Dear Tom!" she said. "I do love you, but you're so bashful!"

"Begob, I'm the happiest man outside of ould Ireland. Whoop!" and in his great joy he hugged the old lady, kissed old Nick, and then hugged Kit.

"That's the way I did Ben and Isabel," said the scout, laughing.

"I found them dead in love, and the poor fellow with not courage enough to tell her so. I married them in less than two hours after."

"Married them!"

"Yes—I'm a territorial magistrate, you know, and thus made them all happy."

Tom crept to Sarah's side, stole an arm around her waist and whispered in her ear that now was the time to get married.

She shook her head and refused to be persuaded to marry then and there.

He was happy enough, however, and did not urge his suit further.

"In a year from now," she said, in a whisper, "and then I will be yours."

He acquiesced and kissed her again.

Kit then told them of the state of affairs at old Vega's cabin, and then they all retired to sleep, as the hour was late.

Early the next morning Kit and Tom were up and out after game.

They wandered off a mile or two from the cabin, and were after a couple of deer when they struck a fresh Indian trail leading northward.

"They passed not an hour ago," said Kit, closely examining the tracks. "There are prisoners among them, too."

"We must see about that, pard," said Tom.

"Yes; go back and tell Nick Wadly, and then come back with our horses."

Tom did so, and Kit followed the trail on foot.

Tom reported to old Nick, and kissing Sarah, took the two horses and followed Kit on the trail.

He overtook him after going several miles, and found that Kit had discovered a family among the prisoners—a man, woman and two children.

"We must follow them," said Kit, "and rescue them if we can."

"Yes; and kill as many redskins as we can."

"Of course. It's a pity we can't kill 'em all."

All day long they followed the trail, and came in sight of them as soon as a camp-fire was built after sunset.

Creeping up to the edge of the camp as soon as it was dark, Kit discovered that he was right as to the number of prisoners.

It was a war party returning home with a white family as prisoners—a father and mother and two young girls.

The man was securely bound, but the others were not.

There were twenty Indians in the party, and they were well armed.

Kit told Tom that the plan was the "Strong Knife," and the daring young Irishman agreed with him.

They watched and waited for a chance, and in a couple of hours

they had five headless Indians sitting around the camp in the edge of the bushes.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

THEY waited patiently for the redskins to make the discovery of the headless victims, and then stand ready to rescue the prisoners.

They saw that the prisoners were not very ill-treated, and it seemed as if they were being taken to be adopted into the tribe.

At last a terrific yell from one of their number told them that one of "Strong Knife's" victims had been discovered.

The others whooped like demons and ran forward.

A moment later another one was discovered—then a third one, and by that time the redskins were in a fever of excitement.

Only one guard was left with the prisoners.

Kit and Tom dashed in, and the guard was cut down ere he could give the alarm, and the prisoner was cut loose.

"Come, follow us if you want to get away!" cried Kit, snatching up the young girl in his arms and telling the mother to follow.

The father seized the other child and darted into the bushes with her, followed by the mother.

In one minute they were in the bushes and out of sight of the Indians.

The mother instantly burst into tears of joy.

"Come, come," said Kit, "let's get further away before you make any noise," and he hurried them forward through the bushes till they reached the two horses.

The mother was placed on one horse, and the two young girls on the other. Then the horses were carefully led away till the camp was left a mile or two behind.

"Strangers!" said the father of the family, "what's yer names?"

"My name is Kit Carson," replied our hero, "and my pard is Tom O'Neill."

"God bless both of you!" exclaimed the mother.

"My name is Jim Hunter. I lived down on the North Platte. I'm your friend for life."

"That's all right, pard," said Carson. "You would do the same for anybody else."

"Yes—yes, I would."

They pushed on till they reached the prairie, and then turned and skirted the timber mile after mile, going all night, reaching Wadly's about daylight.

The Hunter family received the most cordial welcome from the Wadlys, and they were given a hearty meal and a place to sleep.

Kit and Tom slept till noon, and then got up again.

"They may follow our trail this morning," Kit said, "so we will go back a few miles and wait for them."

Tom agreed, and they set out to wait for the coming of the redskins, if indeed they chose to follow the trail.

It was well they did, for they soon saw the whole body of revengeful demons following the trail they had made the night before.

"There they are—the whole band except those who lost their heads," said Kit. "We may as well go back and wait for them at the cabin."

"Yes, begorra, and give 'em a thrashing."

They returned to the cabin and put the two families on their guard. Then Kit and Tom took to the woods again to wait for them.

The redskins soon arrived and charged at once on the cabin, expecting to find an easy capture, as they did not suspect the family had been warned.

To their surprise three rifle shots from the cabin laid out as many of their number.

That reduced their force to just fourteen.

They were in a terrific rage. Uttering defiant yells, they rushed forward and threw themselves against the door.

But it did not yield to their assaults.

A minute later and three more rifle shots from within laid out three more redskins.

That made them sick, and they fell back into the bushes to consult over the situation.

It was agreed to gather fagots and wait for night, when they would make an effort to burn down the cabin.

When the sun went down they had a large pile of fagots gathered. They were to take arms full and rush up and pile them against the house.

At the first run two were killed and another wounded.

When the other half came back in the dark to get more fagots Tom and Kit rose up in the dark and opened fire on them.

That entirely demoralized them, and they broke through the woods with howls of dismay.

"They are gone for good now," said Kit. "I know the meaning of those howls."

"May the devil go wid 'em," exclaimed Tom, giving a wild Irish whoop.

The two families rejoiced in the riddance, and the men removed the dead bodies to the creek, where the current bore them to the river.

The next day the Hunters accepted the invitation of the Wadlys to build near them, and when Kit left the two heads of the families were laying out the plan of the cabin to be built.

Tom remained behind to be near Sarah Wadly. He was too much in love to go any great distance from her.

Kit Carson took a long trip through the Indian country, spending over two months disguised as an Indian in the midst of hundreds of fierce warriors. He met with many strange adventures, which would fill a dozen large volumes to record.

Among several he met with whilst disguised as an Indian, was his

[THE END.]

meeting with Grizzly Bill, who had at last joined the savages and married a couple of Indian girls. He was the most cruel of all the band of fiends.

There were several white women prisoners among the tribes, and he was busy getting their names so as to give the government a chance to demand their release.

To these women Grizzly Bill was particularly spiteful, because they hated him as a renegade, and would not talk with him except to tell him their opinion of him.

He resolved to pick a quarrel with the renegade and punish him for his crimes.

One day he asked him to go out hunting with him.

Bill went, of course, and when they were well out of the way of the others, he asked:

"Say, what's become of Slashing Sam?"

Bill started as if stung, and exclaimed:

"Great gosh! Who are you?"

"I am Kit Carson," was the cool reply.

Bill tried to bring his rifle to bear, but Kit had the drop on him, and the man of many cowardly crimes went down with a bullet through his body.

Kit made his escape, and reached Laramie in three days, where he found the old guide, Joe Murray, waiting for him.

There we will leave him for the present, dear reader, and perhaps some other time you will hear more of this wonderful scout.

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